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Mike Mignola talks all things Hellboy



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COMIC HEROES

NEW! ISSUE TWO
SUMMER 2010



COLLECTORS COVERS
NUMBER 3 OF 3
NEMESIS THE WARLOCK



COMIC HEROES • ISSUE 2 • SUMMER 2010



#199

06

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"A movie geek's oasis." ANDREW STANTON



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Brought to you by: A sunburnt head, re-reading Nemesis The Warlock and discovering that it's as brilliant as we remembered, a slightly taste but generous Chris Clermont, lunch with Admiral Motti, getting slightly too obsessed (again) with Zaiide, Twilight Princess, Charlie Adlard's magnificent hair, and gin.

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“His name’s not Night Creature, it’s Nightcrawler.”



A MIGHTY BEARD

Comic heroes don't get much bigger than Alan Moore,* which is why this issue's showcase interview with the man has been the cause of much excitement here at *Comic Heroes Towers*. He's finally finished with an industry that he's long been a pivotal part of, and you can read all about it over on page 56, then console yourself with the fact that *The Thick Of It's* Malcolm Tucker is now officially part of the same fictional universe as Captain Nemo and Billy Bunter. Who'd have thought, eh?

But Mr Moore is just one of many comics-based delights inside this second issue of *Comic Heroes*; we also talk to the one, the only Mike Mignola, get heavily retrospective with *Nemesis The Warlock*, *New X-Men* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, take a wander down British humour comics lane*** with Lew Stringer, learn more about how to write for comics and, ooh, much more.

So I hope you enjoy this second issue of *Comic Heroes*. Thanks for all your feedback on the first, and please keep it coming – there's little better than settling back in the *Comic Heroes* leather recliner with a cup of Earl Grey**** and reading your thoughts. Enjoy the issue!

Jes

Jes Bickham, Editor

*We mean in terms of people, of course. We're sure Alan Moore is taller than this magazine.
**We suppose it's all a matter of perspective.
***Like a regular lane, but with more fart jokes.
****Captain Picard jumpsuit optional. But comfortable.

MEET THE TEAM

The rakish vagabonds who make *Comic Heroes* more than blank pages...

ALASPAIR STUART
Alasdair knew he was going to be a comics fan when he found out someone with his name was running Marvel's Weird Happenings Organisation. That character's subsequent death has done nothing to diminish his enthusiasm.

MATT BIELBY
A long-time comic fan, since the heady days of *Mighty World Of Marvel* and *Spoiler-Man Comics Weekly*, Matt was also the launch editor of some famous magazines, including *CN's* esteemed parent mag, *SFX*.

MICHAEL MOLCHER
Blackburn. 1985. Michael Molcher's mum wanted to buy him *The Beano*. He chose *Transformers*. He now writes for 2000 AD, *Judge Dredd Magazine* and *Comic Heroes*. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

HELEN MCCARTHY
Convent-educated writer, poet, costume and history addict who got into SF too young to be saved. Moonlights as Yoda lookalike. Weapons of choice: irony, sarcasm, double-headed axe. Mostly harmless.

JAMES HUNT
James is a freelance writer who doesn't like to brag about his credits, but will try and WIRED slip them FILM4 into conversation casually if you COMIC BOOK RESOURCES let him. His favourite comic is *Uncanny X-Men*.

CHRIS BROSNAHAN
Chris wasted his life reading comics, but it seems to have worked out. He edits *www.geekplanetonline.com* and co-hosts podcasts there. He wishes Marvel kept publishing *SWORD*, because it was great.

YOUR FREE GIFTS!

SIDEKICK
FIVE BEST NEW COMICS PREVIEWED INSIDE!

AMERICAN REAPER
BY PAT MILLS & CLINT LANGLEY

BUREAU FOR PARANORMAL RESEARCH AND DEFENSE

- 1. SIDEKICK SAMPLER COMIC:**
Our new ascan is dedicated to bringing you previews of the best strips around. This issue, we've got Pat Mills, Bryan Talbot and much more! Phew. We need a lie down. And a macaroon.
- 2. BPRD SEW-ON PATCH:**
You too can pretend to be a chum of Hellboy's. Simply sew this Mignola-approved patch onto your favourite jerkin, and bingo! You're a paranormal investigator... and one stylish cat.
- 3. GIANT DOUBLE-SIDED POSTER:**
Not one, not three, but two cracking images, courtesy of DC Comics. With *Brightest Day* and *The Flash*, your walls need never suffer the tyranny of plain magnolia paint again. Yeah!



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ALAN MOORE

He's outta here!
Don't ever shave,
man. Sniff.



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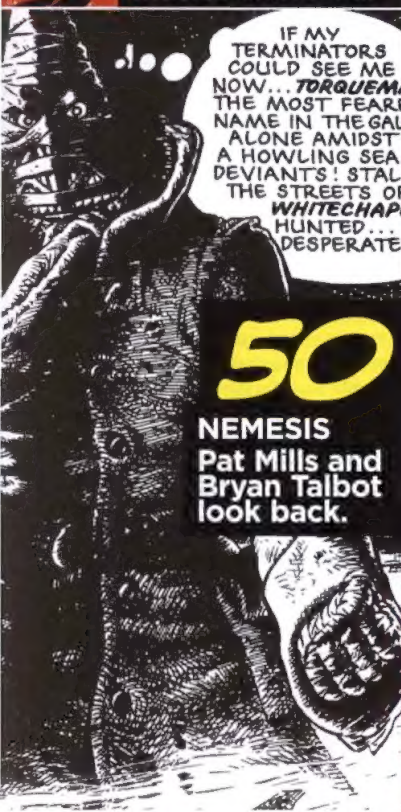
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and why he
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NEMESIS
Pat Mills and
Bryan Talbot
look back.





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MIRACLE MAIL

A man with short hair, wearing a dark jacket, is looking down at a small object he is holding in his right hand. He is holding a small, light-colored rectangular object, possibly a piece of paper or a small card, in his left hand. The background is dark and indistinct.

"Her name's Doris. 'Ooh, *Condorman*'s my favourite," she said the other day, when asking me what the magazine's about. "That Michael Crawford can use my mop anytime." Thanks, Doris.

Thought the first issue was really good, though I'd prefer a bit more focus on actual comics rather than movies. For the next issue a feature on the 80's British classic comic *Scream* would be fantastic, covering its inception to its rapid demise and on the artists and writers. If Alan Moore thought it would be worthy of his talents than surely it is for your next issue?

Ah, *Scream!* A wonderfully gruesome Brit weekly, and unjustly cancelled. Who can forget *The Thirteenth Floor* or, er, *Terror of the Cats*? We'll see if we can track down anyone involved; meanwhile, hoof yourself over to www.backfromthedepths.co.uk to learn more, if you dare... **Ed**



I greatly enjoyed the first issue of *Comic Heroes*, and I'm looking forward to more! I'd love to see more reviews of new comics and graphic novels, as there are so many to choose from and it's always hard to get a sense of what might be good. The DC universe intro was also great, again because it can be a bewildering task to catch up with characters and events that have such a huge backstory. How about introductions to individual characters too, maybe decade by decade in their development, to provide more details than Wikipedia entries can do? I'd also love to see more on British comics. I'm glad Dredd and *2000 AD* are well-represented, but please don't forget the IPC and DC Thompson titles (I'm sure you won't!).

SIMON WERRETT, EMAIL

The DC Universe can be a confusing, scary place for the uninitiated, especially once you start getting into the details of the continuity. But all you need is a guide... like this one. By Chris Brosnahan

[illegible]

25

20

IRON MAN

THE 10 ESSENTIAL STORIES

1. THE FIRST APPEARANCE
 When Tony Stark was kidnapped by a group of terrorists, he was left for dead. But instead of dying, he was transformed into the Iron Man. This story is the beginning of the Iron Man saga.

2. THE FIRST SUICIDE SQUAD
 Iron Man joins the Suicide Squad to help them take down the villainous Doctor Doom. This story shows Iron Man's first team-up with the Suicide Squad.

3. THE FIRST SUICIDE SQUAD
 Iron Man joins the Suicide Squad to help them take down the villainous Doctor Doom. This story shows Iron Man's first team-up with the Suicide Squad.

4. THE FIRST SUICIDE SQUAD
 Iron Man joins the Suicide Squad to help them take down the villainous Doctor Doom. This story shows Iron Man's first team-up with the Suicide Squad.

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10. THE FIRST SUICIDE SQUAD
 Iron Man joins the Suicide Squad to help them take down the villainous Doctor Doom. This story shows Iron Man's first team-up with the Suicide Squad.

Did you agree with our Iron Man picks?

I was taken aback the other day while trawling through the magazine racks to be unable to find *The Dandy*! I was interested to see if the art had changed much over the years. *The Beano* was there, now the only real funny comic on the shelves, but no *Dandy*.

How things have changed since I was a child, when there was too much choice on the shelves and I couldn't make my mind up between *TV Comic*, *Whizzer & Chips* or *Cor!*

IN BRIEF...

Tiny letters with little replies. Mmm.

Thank you for your time.

Dallas Jackson

Our pleasure. You've got a great name.

Well done on an awesome rag!

Motley Corpse

Thanks! Doris will be pleased. Oh, that kind of rag.

Get it in Tesco!

Paul Ridgion

Mmm. We do like some tasty 'it'.

I am impressed with the content and layout.

Andy Briggs

As we are with yours,

Briggsy. Can we call you Briggsy? No? Oh.

It is an awesome book.

Dave Salt

Isn't it just?

I'm annoyed that

a magazine about comics doesn't seem to know about them.

Dan Windsor

You mean comics are real? Call the PM!

I got *Ultimates 3*

number 4. I can't think of a worse comic.

Mark Roberts

Then, dear Mark, we reckon you're not thinking hard enough. Goodye!

seems that computer art has taken over and it all seems flat and cartoon-like with hardly any detail at all. I think this is a great pity as comics are the first art that children possibly come across.

It's strange that this country has always had a funny relationship with comics! Picking up the *London Standard* last week I found that there wasn't a single strip. Nothing to make me smile on the train journey home. We still have comics such as *2000 AD*, *Doctor Who*, *Viz* and *The Beano* but it would be great to see a new batch of comics aimed for the family audience.

STUART GREEN, EMAIL

Kids' comics aren't what they used to be – would we ever see a Lord Snooty today? – but there's still some good stuff out there. Hopefully you'll enjoy our trawl through the history of British humour comics this issue, Stuart, courtesy of the one and only Lew Stringer. **Ed**

STRONG WORDS

I understand why the guide to the DC feature focused on the Crisis storylines, but readers should know that in the DC Universe 'Crisis' is the codeword for dogshit. Some of the crossovers are brilliant (*Kingdom Come*, *Identity Crisis* and *Blackest Night* spring to mind) but the rest are, frankly, pants. I buy them and read them, but I'm a fool. Other people should just read spoilerific summaries and move on to the proper storylines that follow afterwards. Newcomers to the superior superhero universe – we all know it's true – should instead pick up the iconic books for each character, such as: *All Star Superman*, *Batman: Hush*, *Green Lantern: Emerald Dawn*, *Secret Origin* and *Batman: Year One*.

The preview of *Superman: Secret Origins* was brilliant. Gary Frank's artwork for Supes is simply sensational. He is to Superman what Jim Lee is to Batman. Some people say his Supes is too small, but I'm not a fan of the Schwarzenegger physique that became all the rage in the nineties.

Can't wait to see what you come up with

ART ATTACK

Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the first issue of *Comic Heroes*. I really enjoyed the guide to the DC Universe and the feature on writing for comics (I'm hoping you'll follow this up with one based on art and then maybe one on editing or something). The Ten Essential Iron Man Stories

was a great touch too, and I hope you continue this feature with a different character each issue. Very much looking forward to issue two!

MARK SESSIONS, EMAIL

Thanks, Mark! You'll hopefully be pleased to know that we are indeed continuing our 'How To'

series in the next issue with 'How To Draw Comics'. We intend for this to run and run, and we'll eventually get around to every aspect of creating comics, including lettering, editing and more. Hopefully one day we'll get to answer the greatest mystery known to humanity: who's the man that puts the staples in, eh? Eh? **Ed**

for the summer issue!

STEVE BIRCH, EMAIL

Steve! Keep your voice down, Chris might hear you. (At least you didn't mention Waverider. Oh... now I have. Great. He'll be blubbing for hours now. Nurse!) Anyway! Glad you liked the Superman strip, hopefully you'll like *Sidekick*, our new sampler comic, too, which we've got big plans for. **Ed**



HEAT

THE HOTTEST
NEWS FOR ALL
THINGS COMICS!

VISION

COMIC HEROES THIS ISSUE'S HIGHLIGHTS



Full Fathom Five

10 We talk to *Fathom* writer Jordan Mechner about bringing the character to the big screen...



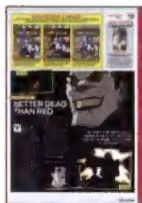
Down With The Boys

11 ...And we also have a natter with the scripters of the movie version of Garth Ennis's *The Boys*!



Boy Wonder

12 The man who would be Robin - and Marvel's heroes arrive at Madame Tussauds!



The Bat's Back

13 Batman returns yet again in animated movie *Under The Red Hood*.



An Uncanny Man

16 Legendary *X-Men* scribe Chris Claremont talks exclusively to *Comic Heroes*!

INTERVIEW

STAN LEE SPEAKS!

Joe McCabe gets the lowdown from the man himself...



Eor years he was the face and voice of Marvel Comics, and these days he's the chairman and CCO of POW! Entertainment. We caught up with the comics legend otherwise known as Stanley Martin Lieber at this year's Wizard World Anaheim in California, where he weighed in on Marvel's mighty movie plans...

COMIC HEROES: Do you have cameos lined up for *Thor* or *Captain America*?

STAN LEE: I've done my *Thor* cameo. I haven't done the *Captain America* one. I don't think they've started that yet. I had lunch with a young director [Edgar Wright]. He's real good. He's gonna do the

Ant-Man movie. So I expect to get a cameo there, of course.

CH: How long ago did you meet Edgar Wright?

SL: It must have been six months ago that we had lunch. I don't think that's already scheduled, but they had asked him to direct it and he was thrilled about it. He wanted to talk to me about it. That was the last I heard, but they can only do so many movies at a time. I imagine *Ant Man* is on the list somewhere.

CH: Is your cameo in *Thor* as a man or as a god?

SL: I love that question: 'Stan, are you a man or are you a god?' I'm a

man. I was hoping that I would be Odin, but you know, they're so short-sighted. [Laughs.]

CH: What do you think of Joss Whedon coming on as director of *The Avengers*?

SL: I think it's wonderful. The man is so talented. He's really great. He's gonna do a good job.

CH: I think he's gone on record saying how inspired he was by you.

SL: The man owes me the greatest debt. That's just so obvious. [Laughs.]

CH: How do you feel about the *Spider-Man* reboot?

SL: It's interesting. We'll have to see how it turns out, but the guys in charge know so much

"I LOVE THAT QUESTION: 'STAN, ARE YOU A MAN OR ARE YOU A GOD?'" STAN LEE



Chris Hemsworth is Thor! Nice beard.

Stan cameos in *The Fantastic Four*.

Can Ant Man work as a film?



Poor old Hulk. No wonder he's angry.

"I THINK THE HULK SHOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN A BIGGER HIT THAN HE WAS. I MEAN, HE DID WELL, BUT HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN A SMASH" STAN LEE

about *Spider-Man* and they're so good at what they do that they're gonna make the right decision.

CH: Have you met the new director, Marc Webb?

SL: No, I haven't yet.

CH: What do you think of *Spider-Man* getting a director named Webb?

SL: [Laughs.] Maybe that's why they hired him. It'll give a lot of people things to write about. But I don't worry. Kevin Feige is the producer there, and all the other people at Marvel Studios are smart. They know the characters.

CH: Are there any Marvel films you'd like to see rebooted?

SL: Maybe *Hulk* a little bit. Maybe. I'd like them to bring

Daredevil back and try it again. I've always liked that character.

CH: Why the Hulk?

SL: I think the Hulk should have been even a bigger hit than he was. Maybe if they have a third go round, he will be. I mean, he did well, but he should have been a smash.

CH: You've suggested that *Doctor Strange* could be made into a film. What would you like to see there?

SL: I'd like to see a great movie come out of it. *Doctor Strange* is somewhat different from all the others. With the nightmares and the other conventions, it'll give them a chance to have some great special effects and a slightly different type of hero. **CH**



A few of Stan's pals make an entrance.

WEBHEAD

STAN 'N' SPIDEY

Good ol' Stan also has some words to say about Activision's forthcoming *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions* videogame, in which you play as Spidey across four different Marvel universes, including the *Amazing* and *Noir* worlds. Him speak now...

CH: Why do you think *Spider-Man* has continued to be so popular, not only in comic books and movies, but videogames as well?

SL: He's probably the most human of all the superheroes. He has these personal problems, which makes it easy for a viewer, or an audience, to relate to him. *Spider-Man* is sort of the superhero who could be you, in a sense.

CH: Fifty years ago, could you have imagined the impact *Spider-Man* would have on the fans?

SL: Oh, never. Fifty years ago, when we were starting *Spider-Man*, we just hoped that the books would sell so that we would keep our

jobs and be able to continue paying the rent.

CH: What do you think of the different universes in *Shattered Dimensions*?

SL: I think the idea of a player being able to play four different *Spider-Men* in one game is just such a clever idea because, you know the saying 'variety is the spice of life', and it's like a player having four games in one. He can be four different versions of the same great hero. And if you're a game player, what could be better than that?

CH: Who's your favourite *Spidey* villain?

SL: One of my favourites has been Kraven The Hunter, because he's a little bit different to most of the

villains. And there's even something likable about him even though he's a villain, because he's courageous and his skills are different to those of any other supervillain.

CH: Which aspect of your character do you think is closest to *Spider-Man*?

SL: I'm a modest person, so I won't answer too much. But I'd say his courage, his nobility, his sense of doing the right thing and succeeding at it. I would say the greatness in that man, in some way, reminds me... of me!



Noir Spidey rocks some cool goggles.

■ *Spider-Man Shattered Dimensions* will be released on Xbox 360, PS3, Wii and DS later this year.

COMPETITION!

WIN! A signed Stan Lee *Shattered Dimensions* screenshot!

Do you like videogames? Do you like *Spider-Man*? Do you like Stan Lee? If the answer to at least one of those questions is 'maybe', then have we got a compo for you! It's an exclusive framed screenshot of *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions*, signed by none other than **Stan Lee**. And if you want to win it, simply email the correct answer to the question below to comic.heroes@futurenet.com, subject line 'I Like Webs', by 15 September. One lucky winner - drawn at random from our lucky compo hat* - will then win the signed print. Good luck!

Q. WHICH OF THESE SUPERHERO COMICS DID STAN LEE NOT HAVE A HAND IN CREATING?

- Spider-Man
- Fantastic Four
- Matter-Eater Lad

*Actually one of Jes's old socks.

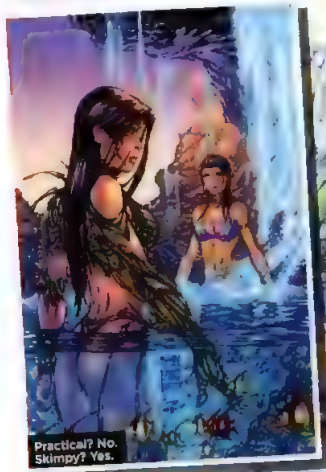


TELL US A SECRET!

KIERON GILLEN

writer of *Phonogram* and *Thor*, says:

"I cried when Impactor died in the *Transformers* comics. But not the second time."



H2-WHOR!

FATHOM RISING

The watery wonder is splashing her way to the big screen, courtesy of Mr *Prince Of Persia*... by **Joe McCabe**

High-flying superheroes are no strangers to the big screen, whether they're soaring on their own, or with the aid of a Batwing or X-Jet. But there's never really been a successful film starring a superhero who works in the ocean's depths.

That's one of the things that's exciting screenwriter Jordan Mechner about *Fathom*, his adaptation of the late comic book writer Michael Turner's series about a beautiful young aquatic humanoid with the power to control water. Mechner, a game designer turned filmmaker (he adapted his own *Prince Of Persia* into this summer's film), tells *Comic Heroes* he's finished his

script for *Fathom*, and he's now waiting for word on who will direct the project.

"*Fathom* is a comic book series that I read when it came out about ten years ago," he explains, "and I loved it. I'm thrilled that I have the chance now to adapt it as a screenplay, and Megan Fox is attached to star. I think that could be a terrific movie, and I'm excited about it. At this point it's set up at Fox. We have a star and a script, but no director yet."

When we ask him how closely he's adhered to the original *Fathom* comic (initially published by Top Cow), Mechner replies: "Adapting a comic series in a lot of ways is similar to adapting a video game, because you're drawing from this wealth of

storylines. And out of this wealth of material that's available – the story, the character, the visual material – the challenge for a screenwriter is to kind of extract one clean, strong, simple human story that's the right size for an under-two-hour movie. It's a process of selection, but also invention. Because comics are such a different storytelling medium to games and film, what works in one format isn't necessarily the strongest choice for another."

Mechner's especially thrilled to be exploring an environment most superhero films have all but ignored. "The world under the ocean is so spectacular and beautiful," he says, "the opportunities are great." **CH**



BOUNTEOUS

DOG DAYS AREN'T OVER

Johnny Alpha's back, *Strontium Dog* fans!

Way back in 1990, we witnessed the apparent death of one of 2000 AD's best-loved characters. Johnny Alpha, mutant bounty hunter, was killed by a demon while assisting the escape of fellow muties from a hellish other dimension.

But nothing is as it seems, and legendary *Strontium Dog* creators John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerro are back to finish the story in 'The Life And Death Of Johnny Alpha', an all-new tale that reveals the real truth of Alpha's demise, as Middenface McNulty pieces together what happened to his old comrade with the help of Journalist Precious Matson.

It's big news for fans of the *Galaxy's Greatest Comic*, and you can start reading the story the day after this issue of *Comic Heroes* hits shelves. 'The Life And Death Of Johnny Alpha' starts in Prog 1689 of 2000 AD, on sale 16 June.



LIKELY LADS

BOYS KEEP SWINGING

Garth Ennis's ultra-violent comic joins the throng of big-screen adaptations. **Joe McCabe** talks to the screenwriters...

Screenwriters Phil Hay and Matt Manfredi have already realised one childhood dream in reimagining the mythological monsters of Ray Harryhausen's fantasy classic *Clash Of The Titans* for the 21st century. Now they're poised to make another fantasy come to life by tackling the superhero genre in their big-screen adaptation of Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson's *The Boys* for Columbia Pictures.

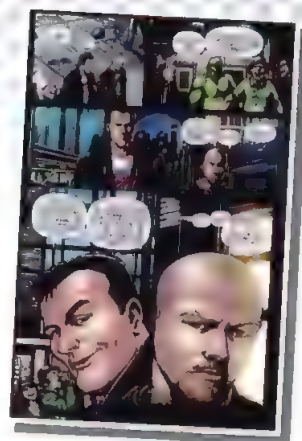
The Dynamite Entertainment comic series concerns a team of super-powered CIA operatives assigned to keep superheroes in line. But as Hay and Manfredi explain, *The Boys* may be fantastic, but it's rooted in human concerns.

"We were so thrilled to get an opportunity to work on it," Hay

tells *Comic Heroes*. "It's a unique book, and it's so funny and so well written and dark. To get the opportunity to try to make a movie out of it is great. It's also a very faithful, hardcore adaptation of the book. It's gone over very well, and they're looking for directors right now. Thematically, there's something about *The Boys* that's very similar to *Clash Of The Titans*. It's that kind of aggressive questioning of the people who are supposed to be better than you, whether they're gods or superheroes, and kind of realising that you have to take care of yourself, because those kinds of 'heroes' are corrupt in many ways."

As for how the duo is handling a story so densely packed with super-powered characters, Manfredi remarks: "It's more for

what's necessary for the story. Obviously there's many movies' worth of material for *The Boys*. The challenge is choosing the necessary elements and themes, and then complementing them with things we invented that ideally melt very cleanly with that stuff. They've all got their powers, but the fighting in *The Boys* is, in essence, like a street fight. Everyone's fighting dirty, so you don't have that kind of big, bombastic special effects blowout. It's almost not what *The Boys* is about. It's about these very specific characters slugging it out. And they just happen to have superpowers. But *The Boys* is overtly a comedy in many ways. Though it's an action movie and a character piece, it's meant to be extremely funny as well."



Acknowledging other recent attempts at 'adult' superhero movies, Hay adds: "I think one thing that *Watchmen* really helped us with... I think that *Watchmen* - along with a couple of other movies like *Kick-Ass* and *Hancock*, even the *Batman* and *Iron Man* movies - it really set the table for audiences understanding a world in which superheroes exist, and the idea of questioning superheroes. The idea of asking questions about the people behind the masks." *CH*

5 THINGS WE'VE LEARNT THIS MONTH

1 Charlie Adlard plays in a rock and roll band with Phil Winslade.

2 Bryan Talbot is working seven days a week to get *Grandville 2* finished.

3 Captain America's now the head of SHIELD! That little development happened just before we went to press, so it didn't make it into our Cap feature. Pfft.

4 Steve White, editor of the forthcoming Mark Millar/Jonathan Ross-starring anthology magazine *CLINT*, likens it to 2000 AD.

5 Our Alan Moore interview was originally slated for six pages, but he talked so much that we expanded it to ten.





"THE HULK STANDS OVER 4.5 METERS TALL"



MODEL EXAMPLE



WAXING MARVELLOUS

Wolverine and friends invade Madame Tussauds!

Madam Tussauds – the legendary London-based waxwork museum – has joined forces with the mighty Marvel to bring us a brand-new exhibition: **Marvel Super Heroes 4D**, set to open during the summer.

Billed as an interactive experience, the exhibition will allow guests to apparently walk on the ceiling with Spider-Man and put on Iron Man's chest shield. Yep, you too can now feel like Robert Downey Jr without the aid of narcotic substances or the backing of a multi-million dollar blockbuster. The whole affair culminates in a 4D animated cinema presentation. Sounds

exciting, no?

The star attraction, of course, will be some brand-new superheroc waxworks, with Spider-Man, Wolverine, Iron Man, the Hulk and the Invisible Woman all rendered in impressive style. (Presumably the last one will be the easiest, eh?) Apparently the Hulk model is the biggest waxwork ever created by the artists at Tussauds, standing over 4.5 meters tall and with eyes the size of cricket balls. Coo.

The exhibition will evolve over time, adding new waxworks and events, as Tussauds and Marvel have signed a five-year deal. We wait in anticipation for the world's first to-scale waxwork MODOK. **CH**



Wolverine is of the lady-pleasing Jackman persuasion.

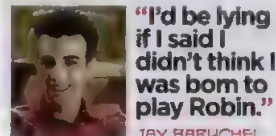
HOLY COW!



THE NEXT BOY WONDER?

Will the next Batman film have a Robin? We don't know, but one actor's desperate to play the part... by **Joe MacCabe**

Actor Jay Baruchel has been making a name for himself lately with starring roles in fantasy films like *How to Train Your Dragon* and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, alongside Nicolas Cage. But the rising star tells *Comic Heroes* he'd love to star in a superhero film, since, like Cage,



"I'd be lying if I said I didn't think I was born to play Robin."

JAY BARUCHEL

Baruchel is a lifelong lover of comic books. "If there is any modern mythology to be found," he says, "it's in comics."

So what comic book character would he most like to play? "Well, I would be lying if I said I didn't think I was born to play Robin."

When we remark that the next Batman film could indeed soon be looking for a Robin, Baruchel replies with a laugh. "That would be bad ass."

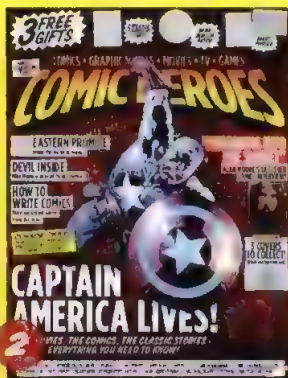
"My whole life," he explains, "the only parts I thought I was supposed to play were Robin and the Dauphin from *Henry V*. But also, if I'm being perfectly honest as well, and this is the part that, obviously, I won't be right for for another twenty years, my favorite character of all time is Frank Castle, the Punisher. That's the one for me. I don't know that I'm ever meant to be him, but that's my character. Nic [Cage]'s guys are Superman and Ghost Rider. Those are the two that mean the most to him. For me it's Frank Castle."

EVOLUTION OF A WALLET

WANT TO KNOW HOW MUCH WORK GOES INTO CREATING COMIC HEROES' LOVELY PACKAGING? HERE'S AN INSIDE LOOK AT HOW IT EVOLVED...



A nice newsprint background gave us a fittingly '40s feel. Alan Moore contributes his massive beard.



Art bod Steve also did another version with a red background - warm and colourful, but not as striking.



He threw some comic art on the cover hits, and voila! The issue 2 wallet. Mmm. Smells good. *Real* good.

Heat Vision
News

13

BEST COMIC
DISCOVERY OF THE MONTH

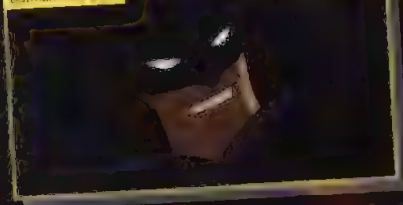


HARKER

Roger Wilson and Vince Danks
Published by Ariel Press

A splendidly gritty - and funny - British police comic. 12 issues are available, collected in two volumes. Head to www.arielpress.com for more, including a free PDF download of issue 0. Luvverly!

Another bad day in Gotham for the batman. Tsk etc



BAT-ANIMATION

BETTER DEAD THAN RED

Batman faces a fresh nemesis in an all-new animated DVD movie.



You're usually assured of a cracking Bat-tale when animation guru Bruce Timm's at the tiller. Which - ta da! - is why we're so excited by the forthcoming *Batman: Under the Red Hood*, a feature-length animated movie that hits DVD on 27 July.

Based on the graphic novel of the same name by writer Judd Winick, *Under the Red Hood* sees a new villainous vigilante rise to power in Gotham City - the titular Red Hood himself, voiced by *Supernatural* actor Jensen Ackles. Other thespians lending their voices to the movie include John Dimaggio as the Joker, Jason Isaacs as Ra's Al Ghul, Neil Patrick Harris as Nightwing and Bruce Greenwood (last seen as Captain Pike in *Star Trek*) as Batman himself. So, no Kevin Conroy or Mark Hamill this time - but we reckon the calibre of

Under The Red Hood's cast speaks for itself.

The movie's also going to be released on Blu-Ray and special edition two-disc DVD, both of which will feature a bonus animated *Jonah Hex* story written by Joe R Lansdale. Intriguingly, Thomas Jane lends his pipes as the voice of the scarred cowboy - you may remember that he lobbied for the part in the forthcoming movie, which went to Josh Brolin in the end...

■ *Batman: Under the Red Hood* is out on DVD and Blu-Ray on 27 July.

"UNDER THE RED HOOD SEES A NEW VILLAINOUS VIGILANTE RISE TO POWER IN GOTHAM CITY"



The Red Hood and a bazooka. Hardly sporting.

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COMPETITION!

WIN!

The Art of Osamu Tezuka + 500 Essential Anime Movies

Later in the magazine – on page 78, in fact – you can read our guide to the world of manga, written by the Eisner Award-nominated Helen McCarthy. But what is she nominated for, eh? Well, that would be for the book *The Art of Osamu Tezuka: God of Manga*, from Ilex Press, a complete history and appreciation of the legendary Japanese creator. It's a whopper of a book, and comes complete with a DVD documentary. Good, eh?

And the lovely people at Ilex have given us five copies of the book, along with five copies of the similarly McCarthy-authored *500 Essential Anime Movies*, to give away – which is jolly good news indeed. Five lucky winners can win a copy of each by simply answering the following question correctly:

Q: WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANGA DID TEZUKA NOT CREATE?

- A. Astro Boy
B. Metropolis
C. Akira

To enter, simply post your correct answer to Mighty Manga Competition, Comic Heroes, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW, or email it to us at comic.heroes@futurenet.com. The closing date is 15 September, and the first five correct entries out of our special hat* will win a copy of both books. Remember to include your name and address, and good luck! **Actually a normal hat, but we like to think it's special.* 



COMPO EXTRA!

WIN A LIMITED EDITION
INVINCIBLE IRON MAN!

For issue one of *Comic Heroes* we went to Marvel's New York offices to see the *Iron Man 2* videogame and talk to writer Matt Fraction. While there, we were given an 'exclusive Sega variant' *Invincible Iron Man* comic, signed by Mr Fraction and incorporating both *Invincible Iron Man* issue 25 and a reprint of Iron Man's first appearance in *Tales of Suspense* number 39. And here's the clincher - there's only about 20 copies of this so want to give ours to one of our

There's a catch, though - you need to answer the following question correctly, and email your answer (along with your name and address) to comic.heroes@futurenet.com:

Q: WHO WAS THE REAL LIFE MODEL FOR IRON MAN?

- A. Howard Hughes
B. Howard Hawks
C. Howie Mandel

The closing date for this compo is 15 September. One lucky winner will be chose at random from the correct answers by the editor's Fickle Finger of Fate*. Best of luck! *Actually Jes's regular finger. CH



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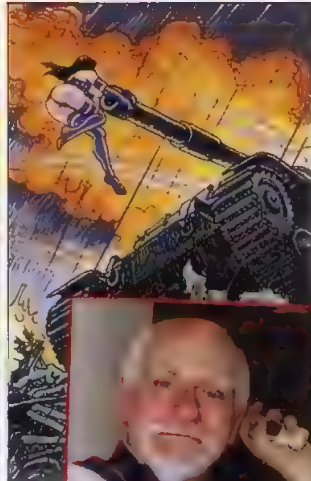
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INTERVIEW

THE BEST THERE IS

You'll know him best for 17 stunning years of classic *Uncanny X-Men*, but there's more to Chris Claremont than Jean Grey and co; we sat down with him at the Bristol Comics Expo to register his disappointment at American comics... by **Jes Bickham**

COMIC HEROES: Your X-Men collaboration with Italian artist Milo Manara is finally released in July. How did that come about?

CHRIS CLAREMONT: Panini was trying to do some original Marvel material, and they had established a relationship with Manara and wanted him to do *X-Men*, and me to write it! So I did. I guess they thought it was appropriate, given my history with the characters, and I wasn't going to argue.

CH: The variety of European comics has seemed to pass America by...

CC: Which is frustrating. The irony is that *Metal Hurlant* and DC had an arrangement, but they hardly got the first issues out before DC called it quits. Apparently the perception in the American marketplace was that this was



ABOVE: 'Days of Future Past' remains a fave Claremont story.

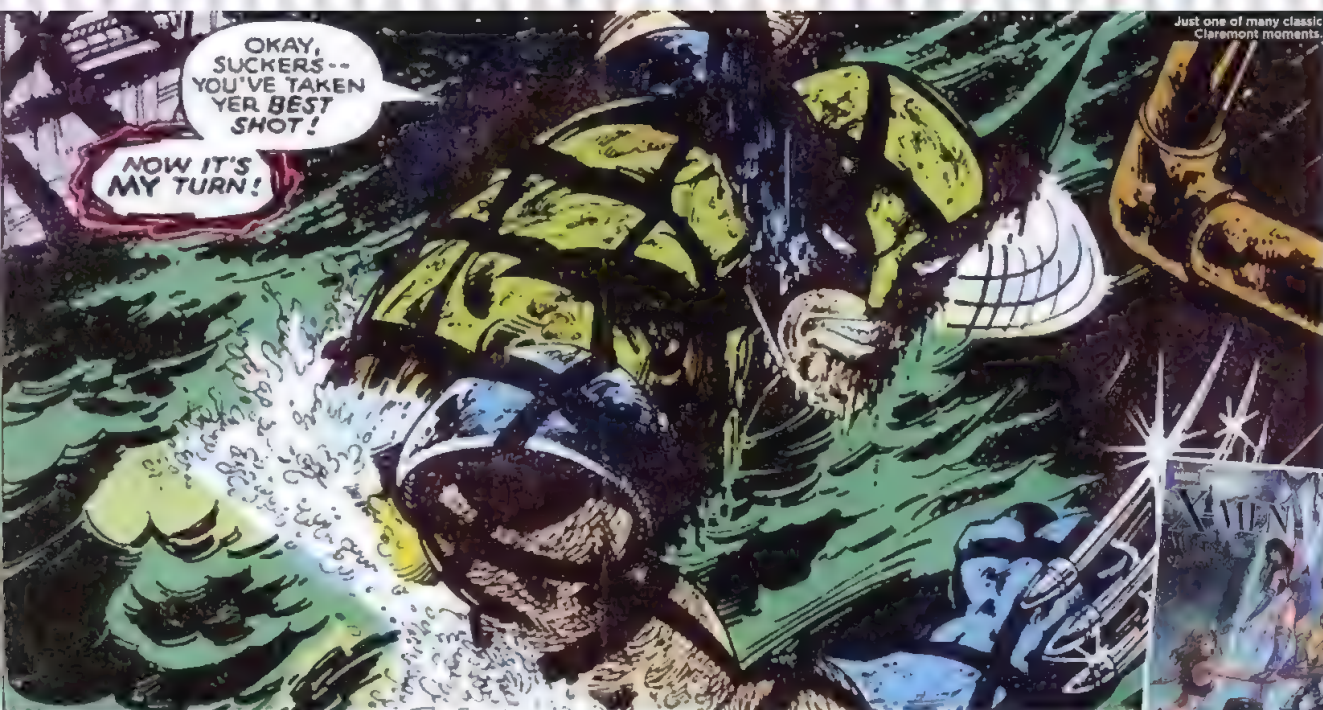
a non-starter. Which is very, very sad! Because there's a lot more variety in terms of themes and characters and storytelling in Europe than there is in the US. And it would have been nice to expose the audience across the pond to different stuff. But perhaps it's very much a one-way presentation.

American comics are accepted globally, it seems, far more easily than global comics are accepted in the United States, in much the same way films are. I can't see *Four Lions* making an impact in the United States! Not even in the sense of its subject matter, but because it's four very lower middle – or upper lower – class Islam English lads. The only point of reference for Americans is the surveillance plane, supposedly in Afghanistan. The US is an oddly parochial audience.

CH: Does this frustrate you, too?

CC: You miss out on a lot of interesting stuff – even here, in the UK. I just saw downstairs that there's an outfit presenting English translations of classic French work, or good recent French work, and that's a great step in the right directions. But even there it's converting the French album size down to the digest comic book size, and it does affect the visual balance, when you shrink it down by that 20-30%. The balance of figures and panels doesn't quite flow as comfortably as it did before. It's like dubbed films; the voice doesn't fit the actor. It's a disconnect.

CH: We have the tradition of the anthology in the UK – *2000 AD* and its ilk – which is something that never really took off in the US...



Just one of many classic Claremont moments.

"WE WANTED TO DRAG COMICS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO LEGITIMATE PUBLISHING"

CHRIS CLAREMONT

CC: Well, I grew up reading *Eagle*! And what amazes me is how much story you can convey in two pages. You look at what Frank Hampson did on *Dan Dare* and it's like, "Wow!" And it doesn't go anywhere near Frank Bellamy. They are on the same level but they're two totally different approaches to visual presentation and storytelling.

Marv Wolfman and I had a tremendous dream to get Bellamy to the States. This was while I was Associate Editor of Marvel, in '75. We were all set to make him an offer and then he died. Our dream was to get the cream over to our side of the pond, so we could introduce readers to the stuff we loved. But we ended up hijacking a lot more writers than artists.

CH: So, those 17 years on *Uncanny X-Men*. That was a long time.

CC: A tremendous amount of time! But it seemed perfectly natural. I mean, aside from the fact that it was a great way to earn money. The idea was that if we could hold on to a solid chunk of our speculative audience, we could use it as a foundation to build and keep tempting them in with exciting, energetic stories. Then it would all be worth it - because the ambition was to grow. To continuously expand the market, and to drag comics kicking and screaming into legitimate publishing.

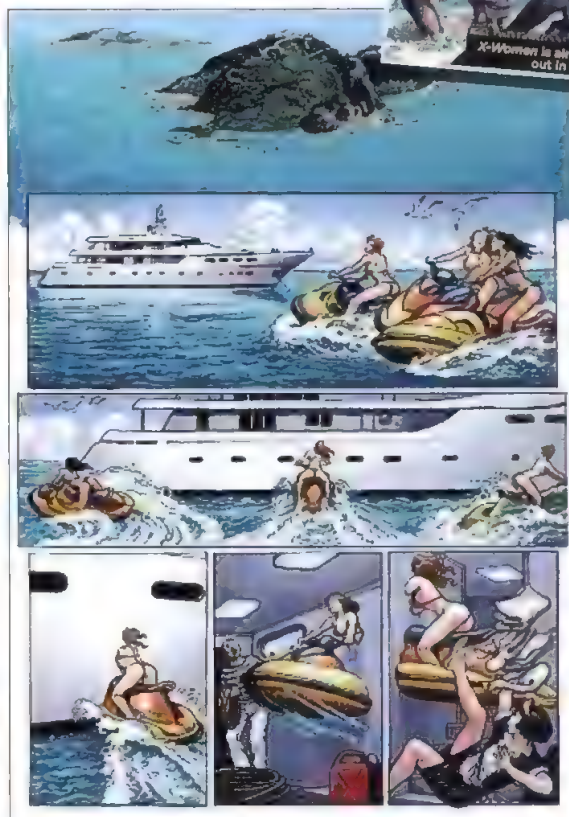
CH: Do you mean comics getting their due as an artform?

CC: I'm not talking in terms of the academic, I'm talking in terms of banking! The point was to ultimately expand to the level of a legitimate publisher, in the sense that we could offer our product across the board to specific audiences. You'd have kids' level, which introduces the books and characters to the young reader; then the traditional mainstream comics, which can run from young adolescent to mature adult, and then you have a DC Vertigo type line, exclusively for adults, that's a more eclectic and personal expression of the medium and the story. We could become real publishers instead of a niche publisher - and instead, we went in the other direction. Which is really annoying.

But that's what happens when you have publishers - or should I say principal owners - that think in the short term, versus 'where can we take this unique story presentation and turn it into a firm, ongoing economic model?'

CH: Where do the movies fit into this?

CC: My perception - which I grant you is limited, is prejudiced and it might even be ageist - is that the published comic is an indulgence. It's there to write off the generation of the source material for trades and hardcovers. And that's there to keep the awareness of the characters and the iconography alive among a core of readers, a fanbase, that will then become the energising force of an ongoing series of



ABOVE: X-Women having fun on holiday And why not?

movies. *Iron Man 2* proves it. \$400 million in two weeks? They're in profit. And the last 30 seconds of the movie set up Branagh's *Thor*. Which in itself sets up *Ant-Man*, or whatever, which will ultimately set up *The Avengers*. It goes on and on. **CH**

■ Chris Claremont and Milo Manara's *X-Women* is released in July.

THE SKINNY

SEZ DEZ ON...
UK SUPERHEROES

IN WHICH COMICS GURU DEZ SKINN RECALLS HIS TIME AS A TRAINEE SUB-EDITOR AT A COMICS POWERHOUSE AND THEIR ATTEMPT TO CREATE A LEGEND...

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...EVEN STACKS OF COMICS FOR... GIRLS!!!

WELCOME, DEAR READER. THIS ISSUE I'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU BACK IN TIME TO THE HEADY DAYS OF THE EARLY 1970S, WHEN UK COMICS WERE STILL CORPORATE-RUN BIG BUSINESS!



...BACK TO LONDON ECH, HOME OF IPC MAGAZINES.

AND WEEKLY COMICS? OVER THE DECADE, IT PRODUCED TONS OF THEM...



ADVENTURE TITLES, WAR, HORROR, SPORT, SCI-FI...

BUT THEY WERE ALWAYS MULTI-STORY ANTHOLOGIES. EVEN BUSTER ONLY GOT TWO PAGES IN HIS OWN COMIC!



IT WAS PRETTY SURREAL FOR THE '70S, BUT MOST OF WHAT WE GREW UP READING IN UK HUMOUR TITLES WAS MILDLY ANARCHIC.

IT WAS A RUTHLESS ERA OF HATCH, MATCH AND DESPATCH. NEW WEEKLIES WERE CONSTANTLY BEING LAUNCHED IN (UNAVOIDABLY FRUITLESS) ATTEMPTS TO CASH IN ON EXISTING SUCCESSSES.



IF SALES DARED DROP BELOW 250,000 A WEEK, THE NEWCOMER WAS MATCHED UP WITH AN ESTABLISHED BUT AILING TITLE AND MERGED WITH THE COVER HEADLINE OF (NOT) "GREAT NEWS INSIDE, PALS!" IN THEIR LAST ISSUE.

...HUMOUR TITLES AND PICTURE LIBRARIES BY THE TRUCKLOAD...



BUT NEVER SUPERHEROES! THEY WERE MERELY JINGOISTIC AMERICAN PROPAGANDA, RIGHT?



BESIDES, WE HAD OUR OWN MYTHICAL HEROES TO CALL ON (LIKE THE STARS WOULD STILL HAVE, IF THEY HADN'T WIPED OUT ALMOST EVERY TRACE!).

ONE IPC DIVISION (OPHAMS) HAD TRIED REPRINTS OF MARVEL HEROES IN 'POWER COMICS' WEEKLIES, BUT THEY HAD PROVEN TO BE A PROFIT PRAIN.

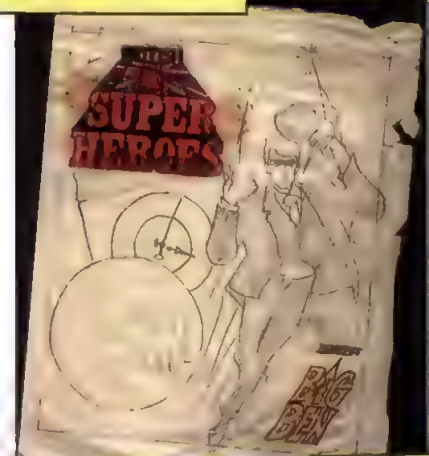


SMALL PUBLISHERS' SUCCESS WITH US-DERIVED SUPERHEROES, NOTABLY MARVELMAN, DIDN'T IMPRESS IPC.

EVEN ITS MUCH-VAUNTED SPANISH AND SOUTH AMERICAN ART AGENCIES COULDN'T CAPTURE THE BRASH YET DYNAMIC LOOK...



I HAD A GO AT UK-STYLE SUPERHEROES MYSELF A FEW YEARS LATER IN 1975, WHILE EDITING MAD MAGAZINE, BUT MANAGEMENT CANNED IT.



...IT TOOK ME A FURTHER EIGHT YEARS TO GET BIG BEN IN PRINT.

BUT NEW KID ON THE BLOCK BRITISH MARVEL WAS A DIFFERENT MATTER. ITS SALES MADE IPC PAY ATTENTION. SO TONS OF MARKET RESEARCH LATER, ITS BOYS JUVENILES DEPT (NO, REALLY!) DEVISED...



...CREDIT FOR THIS GOING TO GROUP MANAGING EDITOR JACK LEGRAND, WRITER TOM TULLY AND THE 'CENTRAL ART' SIXTH FLOOR BOFFING.

SO IT TURNED TO ITS ADVENTURE COMICS UK MAINSTAY, ERIC BRADBURY...



...WHO GOT THE JOB, BUT REALLY SHOULD HAVE STUCK WITH CURSITOR DOOM AND MAXWELL HAWKE.

THEN, IN 1976, STAN LEE'S UK ARM HIT ON THE SAME IDEA AS IPC, LAUNCHING CAPTAIN BRITAIN AS BRITISH MARVEL'S FIRST NON-REPRINT TITLE.



...ALBEIT PRODUCED BY AMERICANS.

UNFORTUNATELY, NONE OF THEIR ART STABLE HAD ANY EXPERIENCE DRAWING SUPERHEROES...



...OR THE HUMAN FIGURE, SEEMINGLY!

IT WAS A STRUGGLE, WITH MULTIPLE EDITS, THE FIRST ISSUE DRAWN UP TWICE (POOR OLD BRIC), SEVERAL TERRIBLY BRITISH COVER MOCK-UPS AND TONS OF MONEY THROWN AT IT. FINALLY...



...IPC DROPPED THE WHOLE THING AND LAUNCHED DONALD & MICKEY INSTEAD!

IT LASTED UNDER A YEAR, BUT I BROUGHT HIM BACK AS PART OF MY 'MARVEL REVOLUTION' IN 1979 AND HE'S BEEN FLYING THE FLAG EVER SINCE.



...INVARIABLY WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY THE VERY BEST BRITISH COMICS CREATORS. AH, IF ONLY THEY'D BEEN AROUND IN JACK LEGRAND'S DAYS!



MIKE PERKINS

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Mike Perkins - artist on Stephen King's *The Stand*, *Captain America*, *Ruse* and much more - waxes lyrical about comic books in his first regular column for *Comic Heroes*.

There's a recurring dream I have. It's one of those dreams that leaves you toasty and warm for at least half an hour after you wake up. You look forward to this dream and when you switch off the lights and stumble into bed this is the dream that you're hoping will revisit you once again.

I guess there's a nostalgic element to it - a sense of returning to an innocent youth - but for me, it elucidates why I'm in the business I'm in. Why I have love for the comic book form.

I'm walking down a street - either in my home town of Wolverhampton or on holiday in Barmouth. Just meandering really, as you do when you're nine or ten years old and you're strolling around town or filling time on holiday. I've spent the morning sitting down, illustrating my own comics in those green Silvine drawing books, on the carpets in the family tent (yes, we took carpets when we went camping! I guess my parents figured that if we were going to be living under canvas for two weeks then we'd better make it homely), and now I'm taking in some fresh air. I happen across a small newsagent or tiny village post office and take a look at what's on the rack - coming across a ton of comics and magazines I've never seen before. My young heart filling with joy and warmth and, yes, love!

I used to do this. Either accidentally or on a little self-made quest, I would go into every newsagent I could find and search down the latest issue of *2000 AD* and see what else



was available. Sometimes, when on those Welsh holidays, it would truly become expedition-worthy as there may have been another thrill-seeker looking around just before me who had purchased the final copy of that week's prog and the pursuit would begin anew with the accompanying growing sense of panic.

I recall rummaging around and finding two-year-old copies of *The Brave And The Bold*, or a yellowing *Dracula* collection published by Quality (which I still have - pleasantly stinking up some corner of my studio with the memory inducing wafts of old newsprint). I can remember stumbling across *2000 AD* summer specials, or issues of *Scream* and discovering the unique publication that was *Load Runner* - half comic book tales and half programmable type-written games for your Spectrum or ZX81.

Living in a world now where most plot lines are revealed online and being able to pick up whatever comic you desire at your local comic shop - instead of taking pot luck and discovering some hidden gem (or complete pile of manure, of course) - it's hard to replace that childhood sense of wonder and exploration.

I guess that's why this dream soars and sings for me - it's an escape to a simpler world. A time that, through hardship, forged and strengthened my devotion to this medium. I try to keep that dream alive when attending the US conventions and attempt to hunt down elusive *2000 AD* and *Dredd* collections and, just for a little while, that dream becomes a fully-fledged reality once more.

MIKE PERKINS

■ Volume 4 of *The Stand*, *Hard Cases*, has begun and is out now from Marvel.





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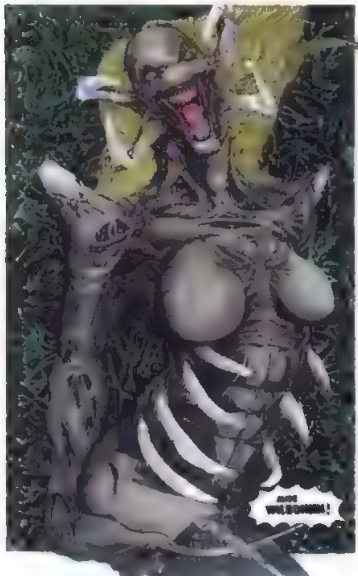


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Comic Heroes pays its respects to the late
Johnny Hicklenton, one of our most
visionary comic artists. By Michael Molcher

a dark vision





Johnny Hicklenton was that rare thing in comics – an artist who could still shock. After a career of drawing uncompromising and often grotesque art, he still managed to save the greatest shock till last: the 42-year-old ended his own life at the Dignitas Clinic in Switzerland on March 19 after a long battle with multiple sclerosis.

Guildford-born Hicklenton's visceral, anarchic art was arguably the most unique talent to have ever emerged from the pages of *2000 AD*. From his breakthrough work on *Nemesis the Warlock* to his LSD-inspired art on *Judge Dredd*, Hicklenton twisted the human body and landscapes to gruesome breaking point. His work was both loved and reviled in equal measure, but Hicklenton refused to compromise, leaving behind a body of work seemingly at odds with the warm, sincere person he was away from the drawing board.

Obsessed with *2000 AD* since childhood, he passed his Art A-level early in 1984 thanks to night school lessons and one day realised his classmate was veteran *2000 AD* artist Ron Smith's daughter, getting to meet him after drawing her an elaborate *Judge Dredd* Christmas card. However, his two *Future Shocks* for *2000 AD* weren't the breakthrough he hoped for – that was instead sparked by his mother's insistence that he phone Pat Mills, whose number he had obtained.

That simple act was the beginning of a long creative association that stretched from his groundbreaking work on *Nemesis* to Mills' *Third World War* for *Crisis* and *Aggre-Siva* for its stable mate, *Deadline*, and much, much more: and unusually for a comic artist, he had work exhibited at the V&A. He also worked as an art director for London Records before joining Swiss label Red Light



A gleefully gruesome slice of *Judge Dredd*

Hicklenton's *Nemesis* was wonderfully twisted



**"I'VE NEVER ASKED WHY I DO THIS
WARPED STUFF. I THINK IT'S MAYBE
BECAUSE I AM WARPED"**

Records. Speaking candidly to the *Judge Dredd Magazine* in 2007, Hicklenton admitted that he used his art as a means of release and escape, compared drawing to a boxing match: "Drawing's like fighting for me and I'm trying to connect as often as possible with the reader's chin," he said.

"I suppose I just want to push people. We're acclimatised to horror these days, you can sit and listen to endless reports of car bombs when you come home from work – that's horror. I've never asked why I do this warped stuff. I think it's maybe because I *am* warped, I must be."

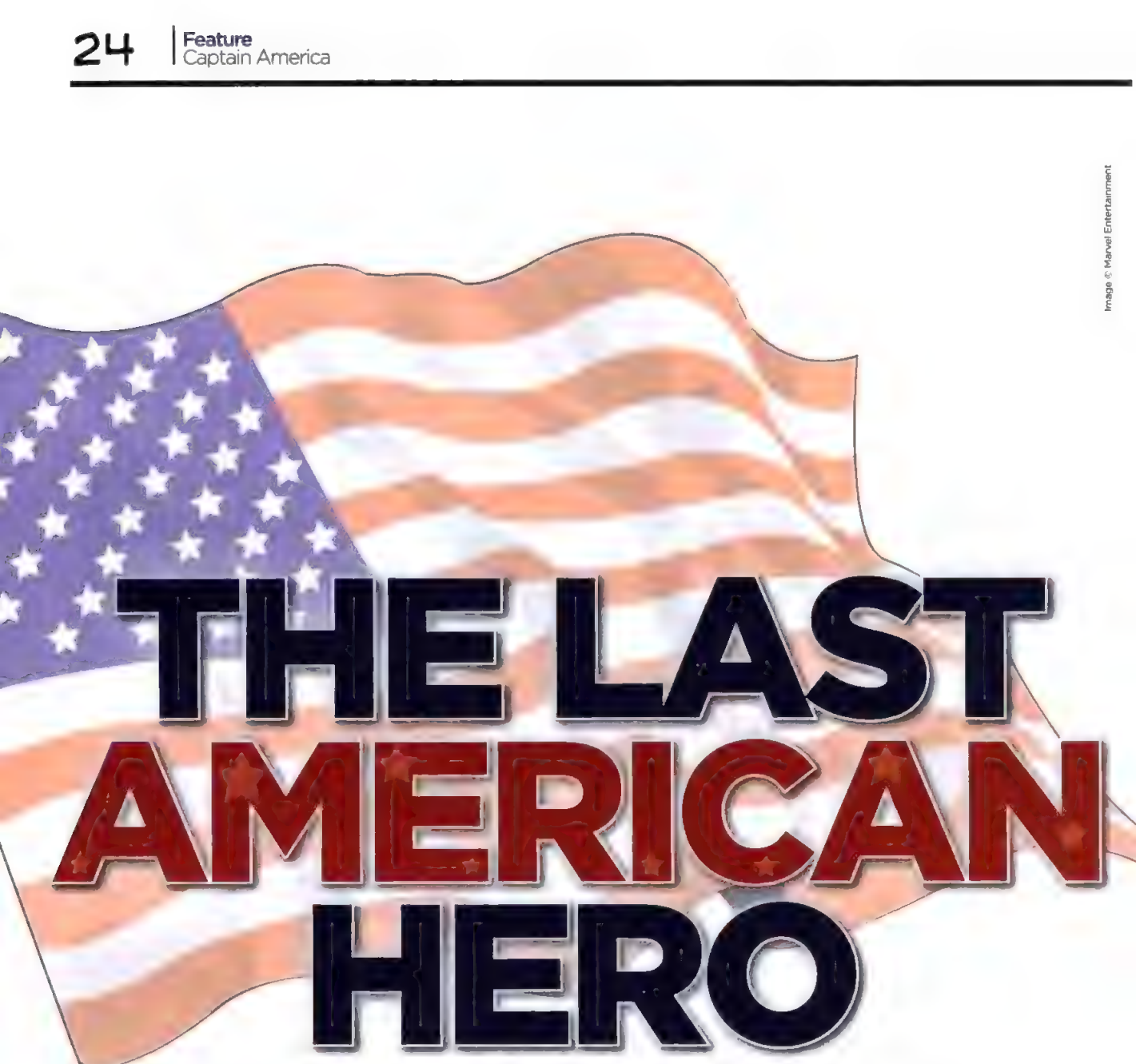
Mills, who told the world about Hicklenton's death, paid tribute to his friend and collaborator: "Johnny's work is not only dark, but there is a strange beauty about it – I think that's what makes him quite unique.

"He was a genius and sadly that was not always recognised. Talent like that attracts negativity because it's not always easily appreciated, like so much fine art, and some years back Johnny had more than his share. I knew how vulnerable Johnny was to such cruel criticism and how these letters hurt him, which was their intention. Thankfully that horrible time, that dark age, is long behind us."

Award-winning documentary *Here's Johnny* charted five years of his struggle with the condition and won praise for its portrayal of MS. Having spent the last years of his life raising awareness of the condition, Hicklenton chose to end his own life before he deteriorated further.

His final work, *100 Months*, was completed the day before he flew to Switzerland. "We were talking about it several times over the week or so before he left," said Mills. "He sent me a text from Switzerland the day he passed away. I'm so impressed by his courage, his humour and his integrity. He is an example to us all. I only wish he could have lived to have seen just how highly he is regarded – and that is why I'm quite protective of him when it comes to past criticism of his work. Because I have known for a long time this day would come and after it, there would be some who would revise their previous opinions of Johnny and his work. Better late than never, I guess."

Brave, unique and shocking to the end, Hicklenton – who leaves behind his wife Claire – portrayed his death as taking the fight to the condition that had ravaged his body, telling friends: "MS – you have a week to live. You've met someone you shouldn't have fucked with."



THE LAST AMERICAN HERO

Presenting ten reasons why we're excited by
Marvel movie *Captain America: The First Avenger*.
(And no, that clunky title isn't one of them.)

By Matt Bielby

While the classic DC heroes were all establishment figures – the billionaire sleuth, the police scientist, the foreign royal – early Marvel offered a much stranger crew. Here was the handicapped gingernut who got more tall than Batman, and the underage kid who had to sit up nights fixing rips in his costume. These guys were outsiders and monsters, geeks and cripples.

All except two. Nestled amongst this appealing rabble of misfits and

hard-luck cases sat a couple of obvious squares – superheroes who very much couldn't be you. Iron Man, the über-rich munitions manufacturer, has recently been triumphantly reinvented as a 21st century hero; can director Joe Johnson and Marvel Studios do the same for the potentially even trickier Captain America?

Cap is unusual among major Marvel heroes in that he wasn't a product of that remarkable Stan Lee/Jack Kirby/Steve Ditko run of creation from '61 to '67 or so, but is rather the

product of an earlier era – it's his curse and his salvation. Created by Kirby and writer Joe Simon in 1941 as a patriotic symbol, he brought his 'Greatest Generation' certainty and decidedly non-hip persona to early Marvel when rescued from a block of ice by the Avengers in 1964. This depiction was soon gleefully undercut by all sorts of shades-of-grey confusion and man-out-of-time angst. It's this that makes Cap more than some government stooge – and a Cap movie acceptable to a non-American audience. »

MAIN IMAGE: World War 2 and a tight blue jumpsuit – a match made in heaven?



1

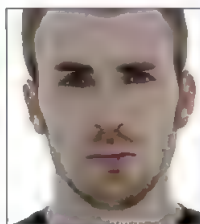
It's substantially set during World War 2!

Introduce a Cap who's a product of today and you don't necessarily have an uninteresting character - but you do have a problematic one. Make him a guy from a world of P-51 Mustangs and Monte Cassino trying to cope with 2011, however, and we have immediate conflict, intrigue and layers of meaning. And in the meantime, we have the chance to see all that cool stuff from Marvel's war years, like the Invaders and the Howling Commandos. No creative decision on the new Cap movie was more important than this one.

2

The principle casting's... not bad.

Chris Evans might not be your first choice of Cap - and the fact that he's already played a Marvel superhero, the FF's Johnny Storm, is annoying - but the more we think about it, the better a pick he seems. He's proved he can carry a film (see *Push or Cellular*) with wit and energy, and he's a more subtle performer than you might think. Yes, he's great as a cocky douchebag, but try *Sunshine* or *London*. The guy has surprising range.



3

The rest of the cast is intriguing too.

Hayley Atwell - until now a minor

member of the Gemma Arterton generation of Brit starlets, best known for her scene-stealing turns in films like *The Duchess* - is a beauty, but not a conventional one; her effortlessly 'period' look makes her a nice choice for Cap's WW2 'best girl' Peggy Carter, a yank fighting alongside the French Resistance. Meanwhile, reliable Hugo Weaving has been cast as chief villain the Red Skull. Speaking of which...

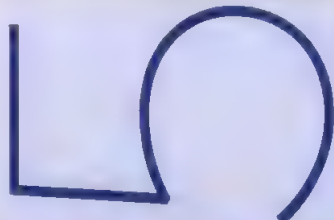


4

The Red Skull is the ultimate Nazi bad guy.

A hero is only as good as his enemy, and the Skull is one of the best:

a super-Nazi created personally by Hitler as his ultimate agent, his features hidden under a bone-like mask and his commitment to the cause relentless. Still Hollywood's go-to for cinematic villainy, Nazis work as the bad guys in pretty much any context, and the Red Skull walks an effective line between Darth Vader and Heinrich Himmler.

**Joss Whedon (might) do a script polish.**

Who knows, at this stage, how extensive this might be. But Whedon's top-notch run on the *Astonishing X-Men* comic shows he not only knows snappy superhero dialogue, but also understands the importance of the plot twist, and of the power of the big 'Hell yeah!' moment.

9

Ed Brubaker.

Speaking of great runs on Captain America, it doesn't hurt that in recent years crime writer Brubaker has delivered perhaps the most intricate, satisfying and consistent version of the character ever: part Cold War drama, part spy story, it's a run that deftly mixes the fantastic



(Helicarriers! Time travel!) with a pleasing grit. It's this we'll be seeing a lot of in the coming film, according to Johnson.

The Rocketeer rocks.

While it's easy to get excited about Kenneth Branagh doing *Thor* (all that Shakespearean background pressed into the service of Stan Lee's thees and thous), the more workaday ex-effects man Joe Johnson - he of *The Wolf Man* and *Jumanji* - is a solid if not sexy choice for Cap. Our main reason to be cheerful: Johnson's sweet and eliciting *The Rocketeer*, a comic-based WW2 flick with a feel for the period and bags of charm.

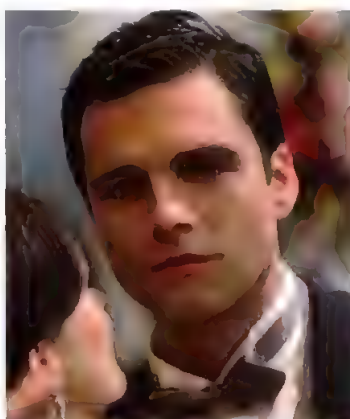
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7

Bucky lives!

Sebastian Stan from *Gossip Girl* is to appear as Cap's WW2 teen sidekick, whose death

traditionally fuels much of our hero's angst, but whose recent revival in the comics is heavy with cinematic possibility. Since he's apparently signed on for more than one film, a Winter Soldier reappearance seems a shoo-in.

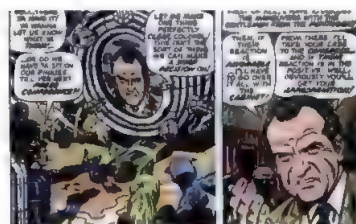


8

The comics are packed with great stuff to mine.

An Aryan superman and clear drugs cheat, Captain

America needs heartbreak to make him likeable: Stan and Jack found plenty of ways to put him through the wringer in the '60s, and while Cap comics are far from universally great, there have been high points over the years: particularly a great conspiracy-driven '70s run, where every Marvel secret army and criminal cabal seemed to be linked under the aegis of a Nixon-alike...



10

They're shooting it in Britain!

Shepperton Studios, home of *The Guns of Navarone*, is the ideal base for a European Theatre flick; filming (in HD video) is due to commence at the end of June for release on 22 July 2011.



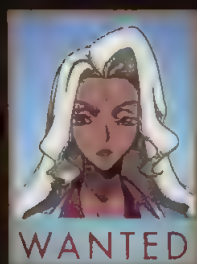
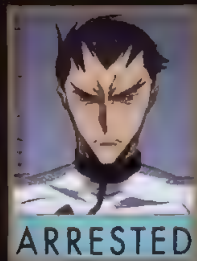
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THE PATRIOT

Inspiring embodiment of the ideals of the land of the free, or a government stooge? **Chris Brosnahan** delves into the history of Captain America...





SECRET ORIGIN!

Wimpy Steve Rogers, desperate to fight the Nazis, submits himself as the first test subject for the 'Super Soldier serum'. Transformed into a model of physical perfection, he becomes the shield-slinging Captain America, scourge of the Axis. Frozen after the war, he's revived to lead the Avengers.



Captain America is riding as high as he ever has right now. With Ed Brubaker leading the way for the comic books,

mainstream acceptance due to the 'Death of Captain America' story, and the upcoming movie, the character has never been more popular.

And yet, in the UK, we tend to be rather apathetic about Captain America. It's much the same reason that we tend to be less gung-ho about Superman. After all, outside America, the concept of 'truth, justice and the American way' tends to ring a little less patriotically. The first two are fine, but let's face it, we're not wild about 'the American way'. Justifiably or not, we tend to be more comfortable criticising America than praising it.

And yet, this is exactly the reason why we should become more enthusiastic about Captain America. Because no other comic book character out there is quite so capable of dissecting, analysing and criticising modern America.

Originally created for Timely Comics by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in 1941, Captain America was a patriotic superhero. His measured, mature approach to the complex situation in Germany was to punch Adolf Hitler in the face repeatedly. The character was immensely popular, selling almost a million copies of the comic and spawning a cinema serial.

There was some stereotyping of the foreign enemies, but there were worse offenders around. Captain America's main rival was, thankfully, fictional: the Red Skull was a Nazi saboteur.

ABOVE: The 'A' definitely does not stand for 'France'.

LEFT: Who will wield the shield? Why, Steve Rogers, of course!

ALTERNATIVE AMERICA

One of the hallmarks of a great superhero is the likelihood of that character being used in alternative universe stories. Captain America is no exception. Here are some of the best and worst. Be warned - there are spoilers in this section.



Heroes Reborn

Rob Liefeld reinvented Captain America as part of Marvel's push to separate The Avengers from the X-Men universe, but

his is not recognised as one of the great runs. To put it less kindly, avoid it like the plague.



Earth X

Decades into the future, everybody on Earth has superpowers and an old, bald Captain America is even more out of touch than ever.

When he performs the 'Marvelman' moment, it's genuinely shocking. It's a great graphic novel, although it takes some careful reading because it's very dense stuff.



Ultimate Universe

The Ultimates boiled the character down to his

essence, but with one major difference: Captain America has only just been revived. He keeps the same morals, though, and beats the utter shit out of Hank Pym as punishment for spousal abuse. He also gets the best Captain America line in history - "Surrender? You think this 'A' on my forehead stands for 'France'?"

Oddly, his entrance was heralded with Chopin's 'Funeral March', marking a rare attempt to use music to create atmosphere in a medium particularly unsuited to it.

In the post-war period, sales fell. Attempts were made to salvage Cap, including his girlfriend taking over the sidekick position from the wounded 'Bucky', but the character was eventually shelved. Despite occasional attempts to relaunch Captain America, he remained on ice for 20 years.

When Stan Lee decided to bring Captain America back to lead The Avengers (Thor, Iron Man and Giant Man), it made sense to revive the original character and use his history - albeit slightly rewritten. Bucky was now killed by Baron Zemo and Captain America was frozen, left for dead. When he was thawed out in 1963, he

CAP ON THE BIG SCREEN

The upcoming *First Avenger* movie isn't the first screen appearance of Captain America. He's popped up a number of times over the last 70 years. Are they worth tracking down, or is a nation of children going to end up crying when their aunts buy them one of these for Christmas? We rank them from worst to best.

Captain America (1970) / Captain America II: Death Too Soon (1978)



Reb Brown plays Steve Rogers, who's basically a hippy with steroids and blow-dried hair. He dons a ridiculous

safety helmet and rides a motorcycle with a detachable windshield. This means that he's not even the coolest biker called Captain America to have appeared on screen - that honour, of course, goes to *Easy Rider*'s Peter Fonda. The sequel is marginally better and inexplicably stars Christopher Lee as the villain. Utterly inept.

Captain America (1944)



To its credit, this one does actually try to tell the story of Captain America. The sets are right and the costumes aren't bad,

with the exception of Cap himself, who looks awful. However, lousy acting, a bad script and a tiny budget led to it deserving its 'straight to video' release.

Captain America (1944)



This Republic film serial stars Dick Purcell as Captain America and his alter-ego... district attorney Grant Gardner. Armed with

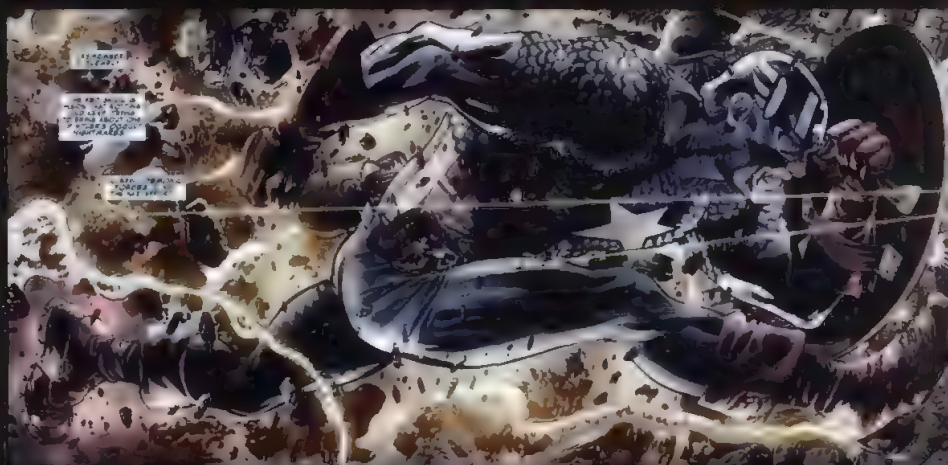
his trusty, er, gun, he fights the evil 'Scarab'. Wait, what? According to rumours, the film was originally meant to be about Fawcett Comics character 'Mr Scarlet'. It may not be accurate, but it's a lot of fun. It's available for free on www.archive.org, and despite a Captain America who looks a bit out of shape, it has great fight scenes.

3 Dev Adam (or Captain America And Santo Vs Spider-Man) (1973)



A low-budget Turkish film that's utterly awful in every way. As a result, it's Insanely brilliant. With a cheerful disregard for legal copyrights,

Captain America and Mexican wrestling sensation El Santo take on the lethal villain... Spider-Man!



"His measured response to the complex situation in Germany was to punch Adolf Hitler in the face repeatedly"



was a Rip Van Winkle with muscles and a shield. This wasn't the first time Stan Lee wrote a story about Captain America, either. Lee's first published work for Marvel was a text story featuring him in 1940.

In keeping with his formula for success, Lee gave Cap a series of personal problems to balance the fight scenes. The death of Bucky and his war experiences fundamentally changed him, and he had difficulty adjusting to modern America. A new Avengers cast of former super-villains (Hawkeye, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch) set the stage for the soap operas that group titles thrived on.

Steve Englehart took over the title in the '70s, during the time of Vietnam and Watergate, and immediately heightened the political aspect. The highlight of his run is the 'Secret Empire' story, in which a secret organisation sets out to destroy Captain America's reputation. This referenced the Nixon campaign's use of advertising agencies, and their 'Committee to Re-elect the President'. Amusingly, Englehart created the 'Committee to Restore America's Principles', also known as CRAP.

The story culminated in the revelation that the would-be dictator 'Number One' was the President



WHEN CAP THROWS HIS SHIELD...

Cap wouldn't be Cap without his shield, but it's changed over time.

The triangular shield

When Captain America was first designed, his shield was completely different. However, it was deemed to be too close to that of another patriotic superhero, The Shield (published by MLJ Comics).

The circular shield

This is the one that's become known as Steve Rogers' weapon of choice. It's indestructible (being made of a vibranium/adamantium alloy), and is balanced and light enough for him to sling about with wild abandon.

The photon shield

The only shield to be designed by SHIELD, this was made of photon energy that mimicked vibranium. It could also be folded up and used as an energy staff. Massively overcomplicated, it's no surprise it didn't last very long...



himself. Yes, it may have been over the top, camp and bombastic, but this was subversive stuff. Steve Rogers quit the Captain America persona, becoming 'Nomad, the man without a country' for a time, until the return of the Red Skull reminded him of his priorities.

Captain America as government critic is a difficult position to maintain, especially with regards to sales.

Effectively, he needs to be separate from politics. Make him too left wing, and the rightwingers will hate it. Make him too right wing, and you lose sales from the leftwingers. Take away the ability to explore politics, though, and it becomes much more difficult to make the character interesting.

Roger Stern came up with the solution, creating a story in which

a movement tries to convince Captain America to run for president. Eventually, he turns down the opportunity, deciding that he can only effectively portray the ideal of America by stepping outside of the political system. This means that the Captain is able to be an observer of political issues, rather than trying to influence them directly.

During Mark Gruenwald's run with the character, he again dropped the Captain America persona, becoming simply 'The Captain'. This time it was because of various copyright and business interests. Because the government created 'Captain America', this meant they owned the concept outright, and insisted that Steve Rogers work for them directly.

TOP LEFT: Bryan Hitch reinvented Cap to spectacular effect in *The Ultimates*.

LEFT: Classic Kirby: Cap! Cracking.

ABOVE: Tight pants: the real secret of an American hero.

He responded by quitting. Meanwhile, Cap's villains found a more business-like approach to their evil, much like the Green Goblin. Cap's replacement ended up becoming the US Agent after Rogers returned for a big anniversary issue showdown.

Mark Waid's tenure focused on Cap's ability as a soldier first and foremost, putting him up against terrorist threats and emphasising his strategic genius. While it wasn't as subversive as some, this run was important in cementing him as an icon. Other heroes in the Marvel Universe see him as *their* hero.

Of course, that became important. Captain America was used to explore reactions to 9/11. The myth of the character was an important element

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, LADIES?
CHRISTMAS?

WHO'S WHO?

Captain America

Steve Rogers is the former wimp who becomes World War 2 legend, Captain America. Suspended in animation for decades, he's a man out of time. Except when he died for a while, when he was replaced by...

Bucky

James 'Bucky' Barnes was Cap's sidekick in World War 2. Missing, presumed dead, he was found by Russian agents and turned into brainwashed assassin The Winter Soldier. Saved by Cap, he was picked to be his replacement. Has a bionic arm.

Sharon Carter

AKA 'Agent 13'. A member of SHIELD and Cap's love interest. Highly trained and competent, she killed Rogers while brainwashed by The Red Skull. Except she didn't, sort of. He was actually thrown back through time and... Look, it's complicated, okay?

The Falcon

Sam 'Snap' Wilson was the first African-American superhero. He was brainwashed by the Red Skull, and became Cap's new sidekick when he regained his memories. He grew up in a racist area and is proud of his roots. He can fly and has a mental connection with his pet falcon, Redwing. As you do.

Cap dances in the woods with his soldier friends. And why not?

of this, and the covers of the comics from the time are absolutely beautiful, drawing on classic American visuals. Post-9/11 America was a divided place as the country argued about its identity, especially during Bush's reign as president. Comics were a great medium to explore this, and Captain America was ideally placed.

At no time was this more obvious than when Captain America was the centrepiece of *Civil War*. Cap was pitched against Iron Man over the 'Superhuman Registration Act'. An enormous success, it summed up the arguments over the Patriot Act and the privacy of individuals weighed against the safety of all.

Ed Brubaker, the current writer, has boldly revived Bucky as the

brainwashed communist fighter 'The Winter Soldier'. He also sold millions of copies and made headlines by killing original Cap Steve Rogers, leading to Bucky taking up the mantle of Captain America at Rogers' request. While his death was inevitably temporary, it makes this an exciting time to follow the comic.

There's depth to Captain America that's almost unexpected. It's very easy to assume that the character is popular purely because of cheap jingoism, but that only ever goes so far. Captain America's popularity comes from that most important and rarest of things in comics – decades of consistently great writing. We can only hope the forthcoming film does that writing justice. **B+**





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CAPTAIN AMERICA

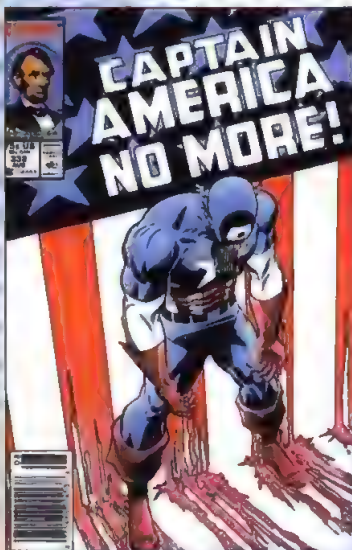
THE TEN ESSENTIAL STORIES

As a figurehead and a symbol, Captain America has long been a potent figure. His classic stories are perhaps less well-known; here, then, are his ten finest moments... **By James Hunt**

GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA

Golden Age Masterworks Vol. 1-3 HC
(*Captain America Comics* #1-#12)

Simon and Kirby may have been Cap's creators, but they produced only the first ten issues of his inaugural series. Their run featured the first telling of Cap's origin; the first appearance of his sidekick Bucky and enemy the Red Skull; and the first Marvel work by Stan Lee. Although rough around the edges, these truly essential stories helped lay the groundwork for both Captain America and the Marvel Universe.



CAP NO MORE

Captain America #332-#350
(currently uncollected)

Mark Gruenwald's decade-long *Captain America* tenure was celebrated for turning a sharply-focused light on America itself, with explorations of immigration, homophobia, nationalism and vigilantism forming the edgy basis for individual issues. But Gruenwald's tenure as writer was never better than when Steve Rogers decided to hang up the blue suit after being forced into the shady government's employ. Replaced by the overtly right-wing John Walker, Rogers spent time as simply 'The Captain', before reclaiming the role of Captain America when his enemies drove Walker insane. Walker went on to become the US Agent.

ULTIMATES, VOL. 1

Ultimates Vol. 1 HC
(*Ultimates* #1-#11)



It's a long time since we've seen him in the present. Gruenwald's portrayal of Cap is a far cry from the displaced in time version we've realised, with his bad-boy, anti-establishment attitudes combined with a more powerful presence. It's a reunion with Bucky, his former ally, who's about to be a major influence on the *Captain America* and *Ultimates* series.

REBORN

Captain America: Reborn TPB
(*Reborn* #1-6)



The death of Captain America was a major event, and so too was his inevitable resurrection. Written by Ed Brubaker and drawn by *The Ultimates'* Brian Hitch, this *Slaughterhouse 5* riff finds Rogers skipping through time, reliving his worst memories. Luckily, Cap's allies realise that his death might not be for good when the disembodied Red Skull sets his endgame in motion. The story culminates in Steve fighting the Skull for control of his own body - but when the dust settles, will the world still need Captain America?

THE WINTER SOLDIER

Winter Soldier: The Ultimate Collection TPB
(Captain America Vol. 5 #1-9, #11-14)

When the Red Skull is found shot dead by a mysterious assassin (after trying to switch bodies to save himself), Captain America finds himself hot on the trail of a man capable of killing his oldest foe, as well as a maniacal terrorist cell planning to destroy several of the world's major cities. But what connection does all this have to Bucky, Cap's former sidekick, whose death during WW2 still haunts him? In the opening arc of his still-ongoing tenure as writer, Ed Brubaker showcases the unique blend of political intrigue and superhero espionage that redefined the character for a post-9/11 era.



CAPTAIN AMERICA VS. BARON BLOOD

Captain America: War and Remembrance TPB
(Captain America #247-255)

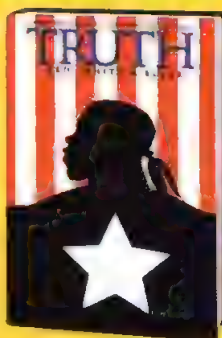
As if to prove that not every Captain America story has to be political, this two-issue arc by creators John Byrne and Roger Stern ran in issues #253-254, featuring Cap and his British contemporary Union Jack facing off against Baron Blood. The premise might be a little silly, but this work of classic superhero action has stood the test of time.



TRUTH: RED, WHITE & BLACK

Truth: Red, White and Black TPB (Truth #1-7)

Published in 2003, *Truth* explores the Super Soldier program that created Captain America – and its unethical experimentation on black soldiers. Written by Robert Morales and drawn by Kyle Baker, it uses the real-life Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment as a starting point to examine the racism of the era. Steve Rogers himself doesn't star – but this examination of the American dream gone sour is part of his legacy.



NOMAD: MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

Captain America: Nomad TPB
(Captain America #177-186)

What do you do when you embody the American dream, but your belief in it has been shattered? When Rogers unmasks the leader of the criminal Secret Empire to reveal a major US political figure (strongly implied to be then-President Nixon) the cover-up causes him to abandon his identity and become Nomad – the man without a country. Rogers returns as Cap only after realising that the flag he wears need not represent America's government, but its ideals.



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN AMERICA

The Death of Captain America, Vol. 1 TPB
(Captain America Vol. 5 #25-30)



With Rogers in custody following the events of Civil War, he gets gunned down on the steps of the courthouse and dies. Writer Ed Brubaker examines what Captain America meant, both to those who knew him, and those who were inspired by him – as well as answering the question: Who, if anyone, can succeed Steve Rogers as the next Captain?

AVENGERS #4

Marvel Masterworks: Avengers Vol. 1 TPB
(Avengers #1-10)

In 1963, Stan Lee assembled The Avengers, a super-team designed to rival DC's Justice League – but they still needed a charismatic and inspirational leader on par with the hugely popular Superman. Enter Captain America, frozen in ice since the 1940s and re-awakened as a silver-age superhero. Cap quickly became the team's lynchpin, and was the only Avenger to survive a roster change in issue #16. Although he was created in 1939, this story is undoubtedly the work of the character as we know him today.





Devil's Advocate

Mike Mignola is a singular talent: an American comic book giant who never works for Marvel or DC, who only ever draws what he wants, and yet whose creator-owned Hellboy has somehow become a household name... By **Matt Bielby**

He was never quite like other comic book creators, that Mike Mignola. Oh sure, he loved the pulps and early Marvel, while the supernatural has always fascinated him, too. He's no full-on indie guy, no spandex-hater.

But his interests are wider than most - dragging folklore and Victoriana into an eclectic mix - and his ambitions are, too. A somewhat awkward fit as a superhero artist, in the early '90s he took the bold move of quitting the big publishers to strike out on his own. Okay, this wasn't unusual at the time (it was the heyday of Image, where every fan-favourite artist seemed to launch his own hero), but what's remarkable is that he's stuck with it. In doing so, Mignola built his key creation - Hellboy, a tough-but-friendly occult detective who just happens to be the spawn of Satan - into one of the most distinctive heroes in comics.

These days Hellboy has become a cottage industry, with two well-received Guillermo del Toro features bringing the character to a wider audience, alongside a couple of animated movies and assorted video games and spin-off comics. After a period orchestrating all this, relinquishing art duties on the core Hellboy stories to Duncan Fegredo, Mignola is now returning to the character full time. His mission: to



MIGNOLA

RIGHT: Johann Krauss, of *BPRD: The Ectoplasmic Man*



redefine who and what Hellboy is, and to bring his hero closer to a mysterious and much-anticipated endgame...

COMIC HEROES: How hard was it for you starting out? You're not really a mainstream guy, but you're not a traditional indie guy either...

MIKE MIGNOLA: But I was trying to be a mainstream guy! I just didn't know how to do it. Art Adams began at the same time and quickly became

the king of mainstream, the most Marvel-perfect guy. I knew I couldn't compete, so most of my early career was about finding a character I was suitable for, which is why I got projects like *Rocket Raccoon*. Then, of course, the Hulk came along, who is a monster anyway, and at the time they didn't want him on Earth so it had another level of fantasy too. I was a good fit for that, because I didn't have to draw cars and buildings, which I still avoid. »



Crumbling masonry is as much a part of Hellboy as Hellboy.

CH: Apart from ruined gothic things, of course...

MM: Oh, if they're falling apart that's fine. I like drawing old statues and crumbly architecture, where the chimney is at an odd angle. But skyscrapers, no thanks. Anything cold and precise has no meaning to me.

CH: But after Hulk you were back to working on traditional superheroes for a time.

MM: Next was *Alpha Flight*, probably my worst experience in comics. It was the real world with guys in spandex and pretty girls and some robot guy; all things I'm not suited to draw. Worse, it was set in Canada, and I didn't know what Canada looked like!

So somehow I had this career drawing superheroes I wasn't suited to, which culminated in a giant project for DC called *Cosmic Odyssey*, almost the ultimate superhero story. Although I enjoyed parts of it – the clunkier heroes, the Jack Kirby ones – I knew I never wanted to work on anything like that again. So when *Gotham By Gaslight* came along [the first *Elseworlds*, about a Victorian Batman chasing Jack the Ripper] I jumped at it, though I knew it was going to be a research nightmare. Here was an opportunity to re-establish myself as a horror artist, drawing the material I loved.

CH: Is Batman the best fit for your personal style among the more mainstream heroes?

MM: Probably, and he's easy for me to draw. But he's DC, and I grew up reading Marvel, so I never had a real emotional connection to him. What I loved were the Fantastic Four and Thor – especially Thor: all that cosmic grandeur mixed with folk stories and mythology. A lot of my work comes from that.



Lobster Johnson is Mignola's homage to pulp heroes.

MIGNOLA
[2]

B.P.R.D.

WAR ON FROGS



Frogs are bad news in the BPRD universe. We're not surprised.



CH: Not least your own most famous creation, Hellboy...

MM: After *Gotham By Gaslight*, and drawing the Topps Comics adaptation of the movie *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, I was itching to create my own supernatural story. This was the time of Image, so it suddenly seemed viable to go it alone.

First I toyed with the idea of a very commercial Batman-style character, but I couldn't get excited about it. So I thought, 'Why not really go for it? Why not create a character I'll love

"I LOVED THOR; THE COSMIC GRANDEUR MIXED WITH FOLK STORIES AND MYTHOLOGY"

drawing in a strip that contains all the things I'm interested in?' My big fear was not that it might fail, but that I'd create something I'd end up hating.

CH: Where did Hellboy come from? How did you create this devil-monster guy?

MM: I'd started to create this Kirby-like monster in convention sketches, and one time I was doing him the name 'Hellboy' popped into my head. There was a space on his belt buckle, so I put it on there and the name stuck.

Later, when I was trying to develop my own comic, I wanted to do a team book - kinda like the *Fantastic Four* - so I put my big monster character in there. The problem was, I couldn't think of a good name for them - certainly, nothing as strong as Hellboy. Because of that the thing started to change. It still had elements of a team book, but now the background monster was the star of the show.

From there things developed fast. Certainly, the idea of making him red,

like the devil, came easy. I thought it would be funny if the hero looks like the bad guy.

CH: And Hellboy has become the perfect vehicle for you, rammed with the things you love...

MM: With the first Hellboy series [*Seed of Destruction*, 1994] I got John Byrne to script it based on my notes, because I felt insecure about my writing. But I soon realised nobody understood the character like I did, and I really had to do it all myself.

So the second story I did on my own and was, of course, a nightmare. But then came 'The Corpse', based around an episodic little folk tale about a man carrying a body, the twist being that in my version Hellboy's the main guy. Because I already had the basic story, and was confident it would work, 'The Corpse' left me free to develop Hellboy's personality, and though I had a little wobble about it at the end, it turned out to be many people's favourite. From then on the writing



Handsome Devils

YOU COULDN'T MISTAKE A MIKE MIGNOLA CHARACTER FOR THE WORK OF ANY OTHER ARTIST. HERE ARE FIVE OF HIS BEST...



1. HELLBOY

MM: "I did my first Hellboy convention sketches around the time I was drawing *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser*, so the early versions are influenced by that: he looks shaggier and dirtier, like a grubby fantasy character. Most of the elements were there from the start. I remember giving him that big stone hand, probably just because I thought it looked good graphically. In early sketches he had this superhero underwear costume, but instead I added a coat, which made him more of a pulp-era working stiff. I thought, 'Yes, that's him!'"

2. ABE SAPIEN

MM: "Abe always looked the way he does now. I wondered, 'What would a fish-guy look like?' and just drew him. What was harder was developing his character: In the first stories he and Liz just sat there in the background, though I knew there were interesting things to be done with them. Later I was happy to slide Abe over to other people [like *BPRD* writer John Arcudi], saying, 'I've got big ideas where these characters should go, but for now they're yours: develop them as you'd like.'"

3. LIZ SHERMAN

MM: "Liz had curlier hair in my first sketches, but her origin and powers were the same. But she was pretty one-dimensional to start with: I liked the way she stood, how she moved, but beyond the fact that Liz was a sad character I didn't know what to do with her for a long time."

4. LOBSTER JOHNSON

MM: "Lobster Johnson is a great example of the way my Hellboy universe basically has a version of everything I like in it. He's got a simple job: he represents all the pulp heroes I ever liked."

5. THE AMAZING SCREW-ON-HEAD

MM: "Screw-On Head is the weirder side of my brain: he exists in a nonsense world, one that can't make sense because it's made up of scraps of things drifting around inside my head, old photos and strange little pieces of furniture. All the crap that should really be shoved into a dusty corner, but hasn't been!"



became easier: I thought, 'Okay, I got away with it that time...'

CH: What's your working process? Do you write a script, then draw it?

MM: I still haven't figured that out! The story grows in my head for a long time, and I take notes, writing down something I think of in the shower. Once I've got enough patches of dialogue together I'll start to do thumbnails, and then the story really starts to develop. Even when I'm writing for other artists I'll still do thumbnails, because I need them to feel the pace of the story.

CH: You've also done some film stuff, of course.

MM: By accident! It's certainly not work I ever pursued. With *Bram Stoker's Dracula* I was drawing the Dracula comic at the time, and got briefly roped in because Francis Ford Coppola's film was being made in San Francisco, and I lived just 15 minutes from the Zoetrope offices.

Then Disney called about an animated project called *Atlantis*, because they wanted to do it in my style. The problem was, I couldn't

instruct anybody else to draw like me! For the most part I ended up being just an ideas guy there. Later I did *Blade* with del Toro, and I recently did ten days on *The Hobbit* for him. The truth is, I enjoy it in brief chunks, but by the end I'm always desperate to get home.

CH: And now you're coming back to Hellboy full time, and we hear there's a definite end in sight.

MM: There is an ending, but I'm not sure exactly when we'll get there. The beauty of Hellboy is that I still find him interesting to draw 15 years on, which amazes even me! It's rare I'll come up with a story that doesn't work for Hellboy, and I like the fact that every tale we tell makes his world that bit richer.

The big change that will come soon is that after having other artists, like Duncan Fegredo, draw *Hellboy*, for a few years, I'm going to take the character back and draw him myself. When I do he'll effectively be a different man and I'll be telling different types of story. Things will get more surreal, taking Hellboy out of the real world and into a place with

"THERE'S A 50-YEAR HOLE WHERE WE CAN KEEP DOING YOUNG HELLBOY ADVENTURES"



A tiny house, or far away? Only Hellboy knows for sure.

HELLBOY

THE WILD HUNT

fewer rules about how things look and act. The amazing thing about Duncan is that he's happy to combine the surrealist fantasy thing with sequences very much rooted in the real world, but when I take Hellboy back I'll push the surreal up a few notches.

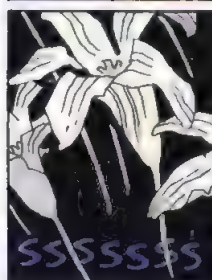
CH: And when can we expect to see this happen?

MM: Not sure, but soon. First Duncan has to finish his trilogy [which began with 'Darkness Calls' and concludes with 'The Storm and the Fury'], and that will end the middle stretch of Hellboy's life. Following that, Duncan can do what Richard Corben's doing, tell stories that take place between Hellboy's first appearance on Earth and 'Seed of Destruction'. There's a 50-year hole there where we can keep doing adventures about a young, unevolved Hellboy. All that 'Beast of the Apocalypse' baggage: that's what I'll be doing!

CH: You say you can do pretty much anything with Hellboy, but then you come up with creations like *The Amazing Screw-On Head* that are even stranger!

MM: It's funny, because you're right. I thought I could do anything with Hellboy, but after six or seven years I started to realise that I do have weirder shit in me, and *Screw-On Head* is a reaction to that. For all its strangeness, *Hellboy* is quite commercial in a way. The *Hellboy* and *Screw-On Head* stories come from the same place, but the *Hellboy* ones get straightened out in the process of creation, while *Screw-On Head* stays in pure nonsense form.

There are two of my stories that haven't been collected anywhere – the original *Screw-On Head* tale and one I did with my daughter.



called 'The Magician and the Snake' – so I've just finished some new tales to go with them, which means that now we can finally put out a collection I've long promised called *The Amazing Screw-On Head and Other Curious Objects*.

These stories aren't related as such, except for the fact that they all take place in the same sort of world, with the same pseudo-Victorian imagery. It's not coherent enough to be a shared universe, but there's a sense they're all made of the same pieces.

CH: Your art style is distinctive. How would you describe it?

MM: Well, I think in shapes. And my line work is nothing to write home about. Many inkers have a beautiful brush line, but me, I ink with a permanent marker that gives a really dead line, and I have to scribble back and forth to give it any sort of personality. And I have limitations. I like to play with and exaggerate the shape of buildings. It gives a bounce to stuff, which I don't really feel comfortable doing with 'the real world'.

TOP LEFT: *Wild Hunt* is the most recent Hellboy story, with art by Duncan Fegredo.

BELOW: Any minute now we expect a giant Nazi gorilla to appear.

I particularly don't like drawing cars, because I have a real problem moving an object around in my head. Sure, if I have a reference for a nice clunky old car it would be okay to draw it once, because it's a fun shape. But I would have no idea how to draw that thing in a second panel at a different angle.

CM: You've done so well with Hellboy, why do you think so few of your contemporaries have stuck with a creator-owned character?

MM: I really don't know, but I'm always amazed at it. Once I'd got the freedom to make up my own world, nothing else in comics appealed. I did a Hellboy/Batman crossover once, and I had to draw Commissioner Gordon's office, which sounds okay - except I had to get reference for what it looked like! I remember thinking, 'God, I don't want to have to do that again.'

■ The *Screw-On Head* book will be out in August, with Mignola's artistic return to *Hellboy* hot on its heels.

Will Hellboy embrace his true destiny as a bad guy? Nah!



Look, we told you a giant gorilla would turn up at some point, accompanied, no doubt, by an "Aw, crap" from our hero.

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ally Slopers Half Holiday

FOUNDED AND CONDUCTED BY GILBERT DALZIEL.

Vol. IX.—No. 414.]

SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 1892

[ONE P]



APRIL FOOLS' DAY.

"My unfortunate Parents seem to be for ever living in a state of perpetual melancholy. Now and again, 'tis true, a gleam of light suffices to dispel the murky atmosphere which surrounds them, but the gleam is never more than of brief duration. On the First of April the arrival of three hampers brought up things a little, but the disclosure of their contents soon blighted budding hopes. No. 1 hamper contained several bottles, labelled 'Unsweetened.' On sampling, Poor Pa discovered that paraffin was nearer the mark. On the contents of Nos. 2 and 3 hampers I prefer to remain silent."—TOOTSIK.

BEAUTIFUL SPRING!



A beautiful morning, the sun shining brilliantly, and not a cloud in the sky. "Ha, ha!" murmured Tootsik, "this is something like spring weather." Two hours later the wind changed, clouds are—



Swept over the sun, and Duggins almost weeps with the cold. The next morning, matters appearing worse, Duggins dons his warmest winter clothes, and saunters forth. At the end of an hour another change.



From mid-summer to mid-winter in one brief moment, with a water-cart thrown in to add to the discomfort, and yet people wonder why they are always laid up with a cold.

BAD TIMES AT THE BANK

THE Bank of England has had its struggles, and enough are some of its traditions.

The Bank first commenced operations in 1694, and the secretaries and clerks numbered but fifty-four. Their united salaries amounted to only £4,350. In 1707, upon a threatened invasion by the Pretender, run on the Bank occurred. When it took place, instead of withdrawing their deposits, carried in cash to help the establishment. A private individual had but £500, brought it in, and, on the story being Queen Anne, she sent him £100, with an obligation Treasury to repay the whole £600. Encouragement this, gave firmness to the Bank, and enabled them call of 20 per cent. on the proprietors, to preserve credit.

A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1712, "Visitors are sometimes shown, in the bullion of identical old chest, somewhat larger than a common man's." The first books were also shown, which the small beginnings and grand development of the establishment.

During the panic of 1825, one December evening, closed its doors with only £1,037,000 in its coffers. Afterwards they had only a few thousands. The remembered they had in stock a box full of old notes, which were at once issued, and the Bank's

JUST FOR LAUGHS

In newsagents today, the comics section is dominated by individual franchises from *Noddy* to *Doctor Who*, but a few decades ago original comics were plentiful and popular. Cartoonist Lew Stringer looks at the most enduring form of British comics – the humour titles...

Cartoons and short gag strips were introduced to brighten up the text-heavy pages of early satirical papers in the pre-telly days of the 19th century. One, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, launched in 1884, was a sort of Victorian equivalent of *Private Eye* magazine, poking fun at topical aspects of the day. Inspired by its success, rival publisher Alfred Harmsworth and his company Amalgamated Press launched *Comic Cuts* and *Illustrated Chips* in 1890 and the British comics industry was underway, with many more titles to follow.

Initially the comics only featured one-off strips but regular characters gradually appeared. In 1896, artist Tom Browne created Weary Waddles and Tired Timmy (later renamed Weary Willie and Tired Tim) for the cover of *Illustrated Chips*. The concept was simple but it offered lots of story potential; the wandering tramps encountered a new situation every

week, predictably resulting in comedy chaos. Its success encouraged other comic papers to produce variations on the theme. The strip outlived its creator, and continued on the cover of *Illustrated Chips* until the final issue in 1953, drawn for the rest of its run by Percy Cocking – a name that would undoubtedly have provided much schoolboy mirth if publishers had allowed comic artists to sign their work back then. Sadly, most British comic creators worked in anonymity for decades.

These early comics only had eight pages, half of which were text stories, so they crammed five or six different little strips into a comic's centre spread to give value for money. This left no room for character development, so the emphasis was solely on pranks backfiring, comedy pratfalls and similar visual liveliness, usually with the moral message that bullies and wrong 'uns got their just desserts. Originally the comics had been aimed at adults, but »



LEFT: The original comedy rogue, Ally Sloper. Liked a drink.

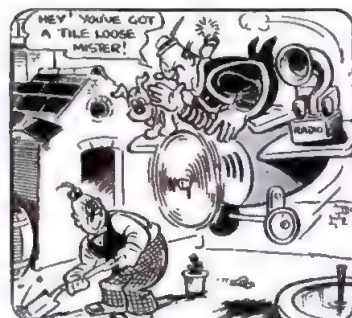
RIGHT: The one, the only, Johnny Fartpants! Nothing wrong with a good trump, eh?

Great News of "THE IRON FISH"—Inside

THE BEANO

2nd

EVERY THURSDAY. No. 421. AUG. 12th, 1950.



now publishers saw a more lucrative market by pitching their wares at children. Some, such as *The Rainbow*, were aimed even younger at the 'nursery' or pre-school market.

Printed on cheap paper and aimed at the working class, the strips championed the underdog while poking fun at the establishment. As seen in fiction from Dickens to *Coronation Street*, the more impoverished a character was, the better his sense of justice and fair play, while wealthy authority figures were often shown as cruel and sadistic bullies (except for the occasional generous millionaire who would reward the heroes with a slap-up feed in the Christmas issues). Today, those old comics can be viewed as interesting social documents, but there was also a negative aspect to them in their depictions of racial stereotypes.

SCOTTISH UPRISING

Towards the end of the 1930s, the traditional comic was beginning to look old-fashioned, but Amalgamated Press was shaken out of its complacency in December 1937 when Dundee publisher DC Thomson launched *The Dandy*, following it up six months later with the first issue of *The Beano*. Unlike most of their contemporaries, the Scottish weeklies had full colour covers, giving them immediate impact on the newsstands and the stories were more robust and fresh than anything their rivals had provided. The comics soldiered on throughout World War 2, although paper shortages led to *The Dandy* and *The Beano* being published on alternate weeks, and some comics vanished altogether.

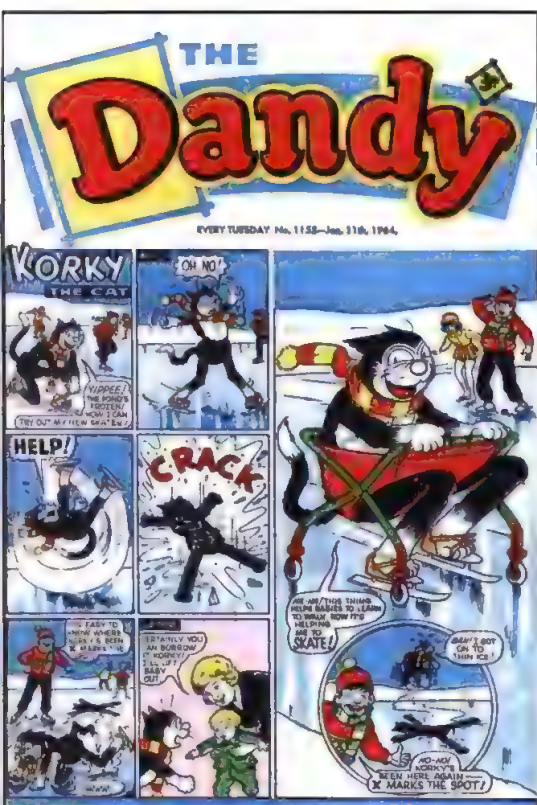
Humour comics were a profitable business for publishers as long as the titles evolved with the times and in 1950, *The Beano* peaked at sales of two million copies for one issue. However, with the increasing prosperity of the post-war years, readers were losing interest in stories of amicable tramps



ABOVE: Biffo The Bear. We always found him slightly disturbing.

LEFT: Jonah is part of an honourable tradition of humour strips.

**AUTHORITY FIGURES
WERE OFTEN CRUEL
AND SADISTIC BULLIES**



and television was proving to be a new distraction for children. Publishers responded by launching *TV Comic* and *TV Fun*, with strips based on TV stars, and *The Beano* had a renaissance by introducing new characters that would become synonymous with British comics.

IF THE KIDS ARE UNITED

The revolution began in 1951 when *Dennis The Menace* debuted in *The Beano*, drawn by Davy Law. Naughty schoolkids were not a new phenomenon for comics, but the sullen, wild-haired Dennis seemed like an anarchic force of nature compared to the cheery little pranksters that

TOP RIGHT: The brilliantly-named Grimly Feendish

RIGHT: Jamie Smart's refreshing take on *Desperate Dan*



had preceded him. The strip inspired 22-year-old cartoonist Leo Baxendale to submit his own work to the comic. Soon, *Little Plum*, *Minnie the Minx*, and *The Bash Street Kids* were born - all illustrated by Baxendale and, along with Ken Reid's new character Roger the Dodger, revitalised *The Beano* in 1953 with their high-energy exploits. That same year, *Chips and Comic Cuts* folded, indicating that the Amalgamated Press era had been well and truly superseded by Thomson's new breed of cartoonists.

By 1960, Amalgamated Press had become Fleetway Publications, which set out to compete with Thomson by launching *Buster: Son Of Andy Capp*, in

SIX OF THE BEST

Giving a few of the funny guys their due...

TOM BROWNE (1870 - 1910)

A celebrated artist of the time, Browne's economy of line and exaggerated slapstick poses for *Weary Willie* and *Tired Tim* gave birth to a traditional British comic style that's still in evidence today. Even Charlie Chaplin was inspired, once saying: "I started *The Tramp* to make people laugh because those other old tramps, *Weary Willie* and *Tired Tim*, had always made me laugh."

ROY WILSON (1900 - 1965)

Bringing warmth and fun to the golden age of comics, Wilson's lively approach became the house style at Amalgamated Press, with other artists encouraged to emulate his techniques.

DUDLEY D. WATKINS (1907 - 1969)

The original artist of *Desperate Dan*, *Lord Snooty*, *Biffo The Bear* and others, Watkins excelled at both humour and adventure strips. DC Thomson considered him its finest artist, allowing him the rare privilege of the time to sign his work.

LEO BAXENDALE (b.1930)

From *The Bash Street Kids* in the 1950s to *Clever Dick* and *Willy the Kid* in the 1970s, Baxendale's work was genuinely funny and often surreal. His style represented the post-war age of comics, influencing humour comics up to the present day.

KEN REID (1919 - 1987)

For *The Beano*, Reid had illustrated the maritime misadventures of *Jonah*, a goonish sailor who was a jinx to any ship he set foot on, and a strip that remains one of the finest that the comic has ever produced. His later work on *Frankie Stein*, *The Nervs* and *Faceache* reached heights of ghoulish comic genius that has never been equalled.

JAMIE SMART (b.1979)

Breaking in via indie adult comic *Bear*, Jamie Smart completely revitalized *Desperate Dan* for *The Dandy* a few years ago. Smart's modern approach and snappy writing style has brought the fun back to the strip in a big way.



COMICAL HEROES

Just a few of UK comics' memorable characters...

ALLY SLOPER

(*Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, 1884)

The first British comic hero was a boozy, bulbous-nosed rent-dodger, establishing an irreverent tone to comics from the outset. Created by Charles H Ross, his escapades were later drawn by William Fletcher Thomas.

ALFIE THE AIR TRAMP

(*Joker*, 1930s)

Jolly tramps were popular in the early comics, and what better way to put a spin on the theme than by having one who became a sort of high-flying superhero? Artwork by John Jukes.

DESPERATE DAN

(*Dandy*, 1937)

Originally drawn by Dudley Watkins, the superhuman cowboy has mellowed over the years but, despite what the media may claim, is still partial to cow pies.

GRIMLY FEENDISH

(*Smash!* 1966)

Leo Baxendale's satire on the spy genre *Eagle Eye Junior Spy* introduced Grimly as his nemesis in *Wham!* in 1964. The villain fared well, acquiring his own strip in *Smash!* and later resurfacing in Leah Moore and John Reppion's *Albion* in 2005. The Damned wrote a song about him once too!

THE NERVS

(*Smash!* 1966)

Initially drawn by Leo Baxendale, Ken Reid revamped *The Nerves* in later issues. The story of the microscopic humanoid bugs living inside the body of an obese schoolboy simply known as 'Fatty' was perfect for Reid's talent for comedy-horror and this was his finest hour.

MASTER MIND

(*Buster*, 1981)

This gentle superhero strip included reader participation to work out the puzzles and activities to advance the story, with script, art and lettering by the late Jack Oliver.

JOHNNY FARTPANTS

(*Viz*, 1979)

Simon Donald's flatulent character captured the essence of playground humour, and subsequently such toilet jokes even wafted over to children's comics such as *The Beano*.



May of that year. The comic was heavily promoted in the *Daily Mirror* and became a success, although several months into its run, *Buster's* references to *Andy Capp* were dropped, perhaps to placate Reg Smythe, who was as surprised as anyone to hear that his creation had a son.

The success of *Dandy* and *Beano* continued, adding new stablemates *Topper* and *Beezer*, and intense rivalry made it a lively time for comics. In 1964, Odhams managed to lure Leo Baxendale and Ken Reid away from Thomson's to work on *Wham!*, a new comic. The contents included an assortment of *Beano*-inspired naughty kid strips and classroom capers. The strips could be reckless and unrestrained, from showing a headmaster chomping on a sandwich stuffed with aspirins to schoolkids smoking cigarettes and indulging in wildly exaggerated comic violence. With pages littered with contemporary references to pop culture, *Wham!* and its subsequent companion comics, *Smash!* and *Pow!*, reflected the

ABOVE: Perennial children's favourite *The Bash Street Kids* Poor old Plug

BELOW: This kind of manic tableau is a hallmark of British humour strips

attitudes of the swinging '60s and were enjoyed by all ages, but changes were looming on the horizon.

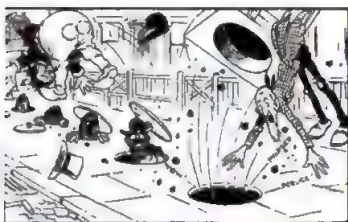
THE NEW REGIME

In 1968 the International Publishing Corporation (IPC), which had been formed five years earlier, spread its wings to accommodate Fleetway and Odhams, bringing its own style to the comics. The tone of Odhams' weeklies, such as the black comedy of Ken Reid's *Nervs* strip had no place in the new, clean-cut comics. The first title from IPC's humour division was *Whizzer And Chips* in 1969, a clever gimmick that claimed to be giving "two comics in one for only 6d". Its success led to IPC introducing more titles throughout the 1970s with *Cor!!*, *Whoopee!*, *Monster Fun*, and numerous others. Frankie Stein, Ken Reid's grotesquely funny monster who had roamed the pages of *Wham!*, was given a more kid-friendly makeover by Robert Nixon for new comic *Shiver And Shake*. The strip became more popular but had lost its unique black comedy.

By the late 1970s, readers were becoming jaded with IPC's comic formula, leading to two Newcastle brothers, Chris and Simon Donald, to spoof the genre with adult comic *Viz*. IPC responded in 1986 with *Oink!* - a cheeky irreverent fortnightly using mostly new creators such as Banx, Davy Francis, and Ian Jackson. The comic's unconventional tone upset retail giant WH Smith, who moved it away from the children's section. Struggling to reach the readers it was aimed at (who were themselves struggling to reach it from the top shelf) *Oink!* merged into *Buster* in 1988

THE TONE OF ODHAMS' WEEKLIES HAD NO PLACE IN THE NEW COMICS





The *Oink!* experience had made publishers over-cautious and subsequently the comics decided to play it safe. Unfortunately, this came at a time when, if anything, comics should have been more radical to prevent losing their readers to video games. Failing to capture the interests of newer generations, the old comics faded away one by one, and publishers opted to shift their focus to children's magazines instead – filling pages with snappy features and pin-ups instead of using costly stories and artwork.

All is not lost, though. A few comics survive, hanging on by their fingertips and trying to be noticed among the sea of tie-ins. *The Beano* has wisely



LEFT: *The Nervs* was a crueler take on *The Beezer's The Numskulls*

RIGHT: *Oink!*, the much-missed *Oink!*, with a cover by a certain Lew Stringer

retained its core characters while giving the comic a glossy modern makeover, and bringing in underground artist supremo Hunt Emerson and new creators such as Gary Northfield and Laura Howell. Likewise, *The Dandy* has also beaten the odds, continually reinventing itself and using distinctive artists like Jamie Smart and Nigel Parkinson. IPC is no longer publishing comics, but its successor, Egmont, launched *Toxic* in 2002, which, similar to the text story/comic hybrids of the first comics, features a mixture of media info and comic strip. Tapping into kids' penchant for 'gross humour' *Toxic* is still going strong today, as is *Viz*, which made attitudes to such

humour more acceptable from its exiled perch on the top shelf.

British publishers finally seem ready to embrace the graphic novel format for humour comics. *The DFC*, which failed as a subscription-only weekly, is now compiling its material into European-style albums, with Dave Shelton's *Good Dog, Bad Dog* being the first of its humour books. If there's any consistent factor across the history of UK comics it's that the strongest have always adapted with the times. As long as new generations continue to find humour comics amusing they'll continue to survive in one form or another. Growing up just wouldn't be much fun without them.





RETROSPECTIVE

NEMESIS THE WARLOCK: THE GOTHIC EMPIRE

Welcome to the weird and wonderful Gothic Empire of *Nemesis the Warlock* – writer Pat Mills and artist Kevin O'Neill's bitingly satirical anarchic polemic for *2000 AD*. By Michael Molcher

Despite its science fiction bent, many early *2000 AD* strips had strong contemporary influences; Judge Dredd was a cop, *Flesh* was cowboys, *Invasion* was modern urban warfare. But not *Nemesis the Warlock*. Mills turned prejudice on its head by making his anti-hero an arrow-nosed cloven-hoofed demon, while his human opponent, Thomas de Torquemada, was a puritanical anti-alien dictator hell-bent on purging the galaxy of 'deviation' with his grotesquely

ABOVE: Nemesis and the ABC Warriors – together at last!

bigoted Terminator troops. Having already hollowed out Earth, renaming it 'Terra', and filling it with vast vertiginous highways and stalactite tower blocks – humans literally reduced to 'Termights' – Mills and O'Neill crafted a bizarre parody of Britain. Influenced by early radio signals, the alien Goths had modelled themselves on a mixture of British culture but, believing themselves to be human, they couldn't understand the Terminators' campaign against them.

Mills says he had always wanted to explore the dark side of the British

Empire but this was most readers' first exposure to that curious fusion of Victorian design and fantastical technology now commonly known as 'steampunk'. Almost breathtaking in its imaginary excess, O'Neill's art runs riot with episodes straight out of the novels of Michael Moorcock.

"Kevin's pages are for me the ultimate in steampunk," says Mills. "He devised the whole world by himself and I simply wrote words to build it into the regular *Nemesis* universe. I have never seen any steampunk art that is better than those first few



ABOVE: Torquemada
– he sticks to his
principles, at least

pages. It's a totally brilliant vision of a complete Victorian fantasy world. This is cutting-edge fantasy artwork. Why aren't his pages more well known – because they're light years ahead of any other steampunk artist? Firstly, Kevin is a very modest artist and doesn't promote his own genius – so I'm doing it for him now

"Secondly, it's too wild for some people even today. Thirdly, they're the debut pages of a much bigger story, so some people can't seem to appreciate them on their own. I think they deserve highlighting as the best Victorian steampunk artwork to ever come out of the UK – or indeed the US, too."

By this point – the year was 1984, fittingly enough – *Nemesis* had become a *2000 AD* staple and 'The Gothic Empire' was the series' fourth 'book'. At least that's how it seemed to readers – in reality its first episodes had been produced years before, right after the second *Nemesis* story 'Killer Watt'. Yet 'The Gothic Empire' had been so wild, so extreme, that Mills had to spend three whole 'books' elaborating before readers were ready.

"I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANY STEAMPUNK ART BETTER THAN THOSE FIRST FEW PAGES" PAT MILLS

"The strange approach on *Nemesis* came about because of a basic difference of perception between us and the readers – or at least the readers that *2000 AD* editorial were listening to," says Mills. "*Nemesis* is meant to be wild and dangerous. Unsettling and insecure. We were influenced by the French, *Metal Hurlant* and the one-off wild stories of Caza, so we wanted to do wildly different stories about *Nemesis* each week.

"Our original intention was to have a constantly changing kaleidoscope of different SF themes. We would have gone off in half a dozen different new directions after this if there had been time and we used the French approach of a new world every few episodes. We quickly discovered that this was not what the readers wanted. Or according to editorial, it was not what they wanted. They wanted more of 'Terror Tube' and didn't like 'Killer Watt'.

"In my view this was unfortunate and creatively frustrating, but readers had been conditioned to think in more conservative ways – by the general approach in British comics at that time – and to expect serials with a safe, secure continuity. In the light of some fairly sharp criticism, I had to adapt our French thinking into more conservative British thinking. 'The Gothic Empire' – originally a wild mini-series – had to make more conventional sense to >>

White out!

Although Mills no longer suffered the editorial interference that had marked the beginning of *Nemesis*, the same could not be said for Talbot, who found an unlikely opponent in *2000 AD*'s art editor, Ron Smith.

"At that time, *2000 AD* was ostensibly aimed at an early adolescent readership and he was absolutely terrified that the comic would get jumped on from a great height for being too violent.

"You must remember that this was shortly after *2000 AD*'s predecessor *Action*, had been terminated after a long campaign by certain newspapers and Mary Whitehouse's mob.

"I used a toothbrush to splatter ink on the page to simulate blood exiting gunshot wounds. Ron was horrified at these Sam Peckinpah-esque effects and used to paint them out using white gouache, sometimes resulting in strange white areas behind people who'd been shot.

"When the ABC Warriors massacre an entire regiment of charging Goths, as per usual, I'd drenched the pages in blood splatters, making it even more gory than usual. It happened to go through the *2000 AD* offices during Ron's holiday and went out onto the newsstands uncensored. Ron was furious when he returned, but I don't think we got a single complaint."

Nemesis

THE WARLOCK

BOOK FOUR

IN 1922, MARCONI BEGAN RADIO TRANSMISSIONS FROM LONDON... THESE AND SUBSEQUENT SIGNALS WERE PICKED UP BY THE **GOths**, CHAMELEON-LIKE ALIENS, WHO MODELLED THEMSELVES AND THEIR SOCIETY ON EARLY 20th CENTURY BRITAIN...

NOW **TORQUEMADA**—RULER OF TERMIGHT (EARTH, THOUSANDS OF YEARS IN THE FUTURE)—HAS ARRIVED ON THE GOths' HOME PLANET, **BRITANNIA**, DETERMINED TO EXTERMINATE THEM!

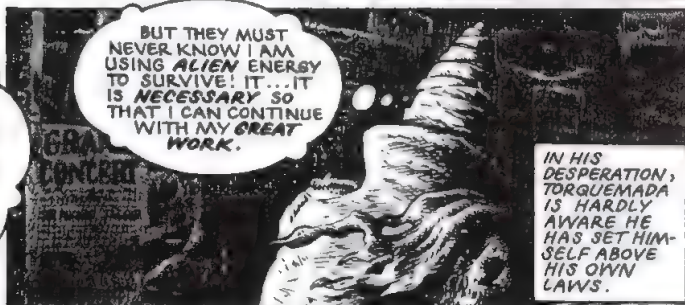
IF MY TERMINATORS COULD SEE ME NOW... **TORQUEMADA**, THE MOST FEARED NAME IN THE GALAXY, ALONE AMIDST A HOWLING SEA OF DEVIANTS! STALKING THE STREETS OF **WHITECHAPEL**... HUNTED... DESPERATE...



2000 AD



FOR, UNLESS I FEED SOON, I FACE... OBLIVION!



BUT THEY MUST NEVER KNOW I AM USING **ALIEN** ENERGY TO SURVIVE! IT... IT IS **NECESSARY** SO THAT I CAN CONTINUE WITH MY **GREAT** WORK.

IN HIS DESPERATION, **TORQUEMADA** IS HARDLY AWARE HE HAS SET HIMSELF ABOVE HIS OWN LAWS.



UP AHEAD, THE GOths IN LEAGUE WITH HIM HAVE BROUGHT 'NOURISHMENT'...

KITTY! COME BACK!

NOT LIKELY, SIR! THIS IS WHERE THE PHANTOM COMMITTED THEM ORRIBLE MURDERS!



LAWKS!

ABC: As easy as one-two-three

Forget Batman and Judge Dredd – this team-up takes some beating...

After editorial disagreements in 2000 AD, Pat Mills had sworn he would never resurrect the ABC Warriors, a ramshackle quintet of war robots that had grown out of the *Ro-Busters* series in *Starlord*, but later had their own series in 2000 AD. Mills, however, was angry that poor scheduling meant many different artists.

"When Pat and I first set down to discuss the story, thinking about

the inclusion of *Ro-Jaws*, I suggested the return of the ABC Warriors," says Talbot. "Pat looked at me in horror, as if I was completely mad."

"I was so appalled by the editorial screw-ups on the first series of *ABC Warriors* that I swore never to write another," says Mills.

"It's now seen as a great compendium of talented artists but it was always meant to be

drawn by a maximum of two artists. Then editorial kept saying that the ABC Warriors were returning soon. They knew this was not the case and I didn't like the readers to be misled. Kevin and I had worked *Ro-Jaws* and *Mek-Quake* into *Nemesis*, because we were so fond of the characters, but that was the best we could do. Then Bryan bravely suggested bringing the ABC Warriors into

Nemesis. I saw this as a great opportunity to honour editorial's pledge that the Warriors would return. But I also saw it as a holding operation – to keep them 'on the boil' until an artist was available for a regular serial. This was why I never developed them to a greater degree in *Nemesis* – they were always 'guest stars', otherwise the serial would have expanded indefinitely."



appeal to the readers. So I needed to introduce the character of Nemesis and his world over three books before getting into 'The Gothic Empire'. But it was drawn directly after 'Killer Watt'. You can see from this how Kevin and I were 'reined in'. It worked because the core ideas remained the same, even though the presentation was different."

However, the sheer effort required by such amazingly detailed artwork meant O'Neill was getting behind schedule, with better pay and conditions eventually luring him to DC. A suitable replacement had to be found, but the readers had not reacted well to O'Neill's previous absence – unfortunately for replacement artist Jesus Redondo.

"Kevin left *2000 AD* for primarily economic reasons, although we both got fed up with various attempts to rein us into more conservative formats," says Mills. "But he had left

me this legacy of brilliant characters and an amazing steampunk world. I felt I had a responsibility to the readers to explore this world fully rather than conclude it abruptly. I was so lucky to have Bryan Talbot continue with it. He is a master of dark Gothic atmosphere."

Talbot had won praise for his *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*, a time-shifting saga set against a neo-Cromwellian dystopia. "Bryan was a natural for it," says Mills. "*Nemesis* had to stay in the comic – if stories were out for too long they lost momentum and *Nemesis* was suddenly this vast universe that needed exploring fully – but Kevin was a very hard act to follow." There were few artists who would have had the talent, never mind the balls, to follow O'Neill at the height of his powers. Bryan Talbot managed to prove he had both, but says he didn't feel any pressure to imitate or match O'Neill.

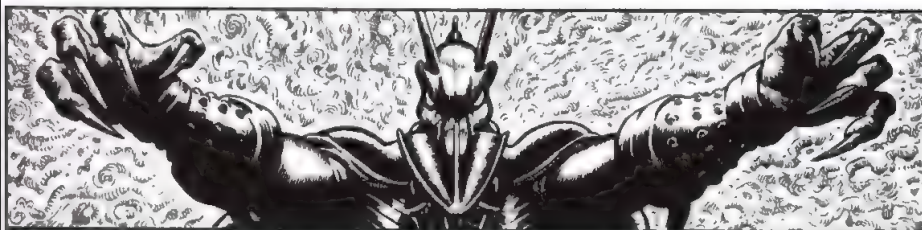


ABOVE LEFT: Kevin O'Neill started 'The Gothic Empire'.

ABOVE RIGHT: While Bryan Talbot finished it in gruesome style

"In fact, Pat didn't want me to," he says. "He wanted me to bring that historical look to 'The Gothic Empire'. I was thrilled to be offered a continuing strip on *2000 AD*, which was, at that time, the cutting edge of UK and USA adventure comics. In a way, the story was already mine. The first time that I met Pat, at a meeting of the Society of Strip Illustration in an upstairs room in a London pub in around 1980, he talked a lot about how he'd been an avid reader of *Luther Arkwright* since it began serialisation in 1978 and how he'd like to do a similar 'retro science fiction' story, especially one like the opening sequence in *Arkwright*, set in a Victorian parallel world.

"He asked me if I'd consider drawing such a story for *2000 AD* if he wrote it. I agreed and he said that he'd start working on one. It was the last I heard





and Torquemada fight to the death. However, the Grand Master's fate is fittingly ironic – he is hit by a laser and his new body begins to mutate. His own Terminators then turn on him as a 'deviant' and he commits suicide in the belief it robs Nemesis of victory.

Mills had used the irony of role reversal before: "I like to humiliate villains like Torquemada – otherwise there's this tendency to think these complete bastards are cool. Mocking them cuts them down to size – it's not always popular with readers, who sometimes deify negative characters, but it has to be done."

Talbot called the strip "a real joy" to work on: "I learned a lot about scriptwriting working from Pat's scripts and his imagination is second to none. We used to spend hours on the phone each week talking about the story. I'm quite pleased with it, as a whole, and there are some nice images but I really wish that I'd been able to spend

PECKE: It's all gone a bit Cabaret, mixed with Mills and Talbot's satirical, surreal bent

more time on it. It was the first time I'd worked to very strict and tight deadlines, so I had to produce the artwork as fast as I could. Most of the time I worked for 2000 AD I often worked late into the small hours of the morning and sometimes all night."

Nemesis the Warlock had been such a product of the collective imaginations of Mills and O'Neill that it was hard to think of any other artist working on it. Yet 'The Gothic Empire' ushered in a post-O'Neill period every bit as rich and popular as its predecessor, maintaining the standard of visual storytelling that had marked out O'Neill's work. This was the critical moment that the strip caught up with Mill's plans, but would go on to even greater heights. The seeds of Nemesis' future success had, indeed, been planted at birth. **EW**

■ 'The Gothic Empire' is collected in *The Complete Nemesis the Warlock Volume 1*, out now from Rebellion, RRP £13.99

The ABCs of Nemesis the Warlock

Arachnon: planet run by spiders as a prison for captured Terminators

"Be pure, be vigilant, behave!": Torquemada's chilling catchphrase

Credol: the name of Nemesis' resistance organisation

Deviant: Torquemada's term for any mutant or extraterrestrial race

Earth: old-world name for Terra, home of the Terminators who live in vast caves, the surface having become a mutated hell

Forbidden Planet: real-life comic shop and setting of the ill-conceived 1987 *Nemesis* photo strip

Grobendonk: Nemesis' nonsense-spouting pet

Hammerstein: old war droid leader of the ABC Warriors

Inquisition (Spanish): 15th century Roman Catholic anti-heretical campaign whose leader was the first incarnation of Torquemada

The Jam: 'Going Underground' inspired the first *Nemesis* tale

Khaos: the name of Nemesis' religion, opposite of Order

Lowry: planet of the Gothic Empire, known for its "dark, satanic mills"

Murdok: home planet of Nemesis' organic spacecraft, the Blitzspear

Necropolis: along with Mausoleum, one of the two vast cities of Terra

Brother O'Neill: pen name for artist Kevin O'Neill, now known for *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*

Purity Brown: Nemesis' human aide

Mek-Quake: psychopathic siege engine, then kildozer and, eventually, member of the ABC Warriors

Rigor Mortis Roundabout: junction on the Black Hole bypass through Terra

Satanus: pet Tyrannosaurus Rex of Nemesis' homicidal son, Thoth

Thomas de Torquemada: pseudo-religious xenophobic dictator of Terra

Great Uncle Baal: Nemesis' evil uncle, known for his experiments on humans

Victoria: queen of the Gothic Empire

White Hole: one of two interstellar superhighways built through Terra

Xali: goddess of love on Karma, to whom the alien Zuggees try to sacrifice Torquemada's wife, Candida

Young Goths: aliens who try to take control of the Gothic Empire

Zelotes: leader of the Arachnons, who is possessed by Torquemada



License to Thrill!

While movies and TV shows based on comics are all the rage at the moment, comics based on movies and TV shows have been consistently popular for decades. Seb Patrick looks at the history of the licensed comic.



3x images © IDW Publishing

Remember *Doctor Who*'s talking penguin companion, Frobisher? Or that *Ghostbusters* story where Ecto-1 flew and travelled back in time? Did you enjoy the alien-hunting adventures of a grown-up Newt from *Aliens*? And how did you react to the big villain reveal in the eighth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*?

If you've never heard of any of these stories, then chances are you're not familiar with the world of the licensed comic – spinoff series based on well-known TV, film and videogame franchises that have been a staple of the comics industry for decades. While not always as popular or well-known as the prose novel series that accompany the likes of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*, licensed comics nevertheless offer wide opportunities for creators to play with the toys of an established franchise – with the added bonus for fans of being a more immediately visual and vivid recreation of their favourite characters and settings.

PERFECT MATCH

Many of the more prominent examples of licensed titles relate to TV series – there is, after all, a natural link between the ongoing, serialised nature of both media. One of the first major TV-based

ABOVE: We ran this image in issue one, but it's just so good we had to show you again! Mmm Doctors!

LEFT: The Tenth Doctor ponders the beauty of a good licensed comic

RIGHT: Confusingly, Spike's also just appeared in Dark Horse's *Buffy*. What?

comics was the imaginatively-titled *TV Comic*, a British publication that launched in 1951 and featured stories based on a wide variety of shows, most notably featuring the first comic book appearance of *Doctor Who*. The TV series of Gerry Anderson, meanwhile, translated particularly well to comics throughout the '60s courtesy of *TV Century 21* magazine, while American publishers became enamoured of comic tie-ins as the concept of the sci-fi blockbuster movie took off in the '80s, with just about every major property from *Star Wars* onwards seeing an adaptation of some

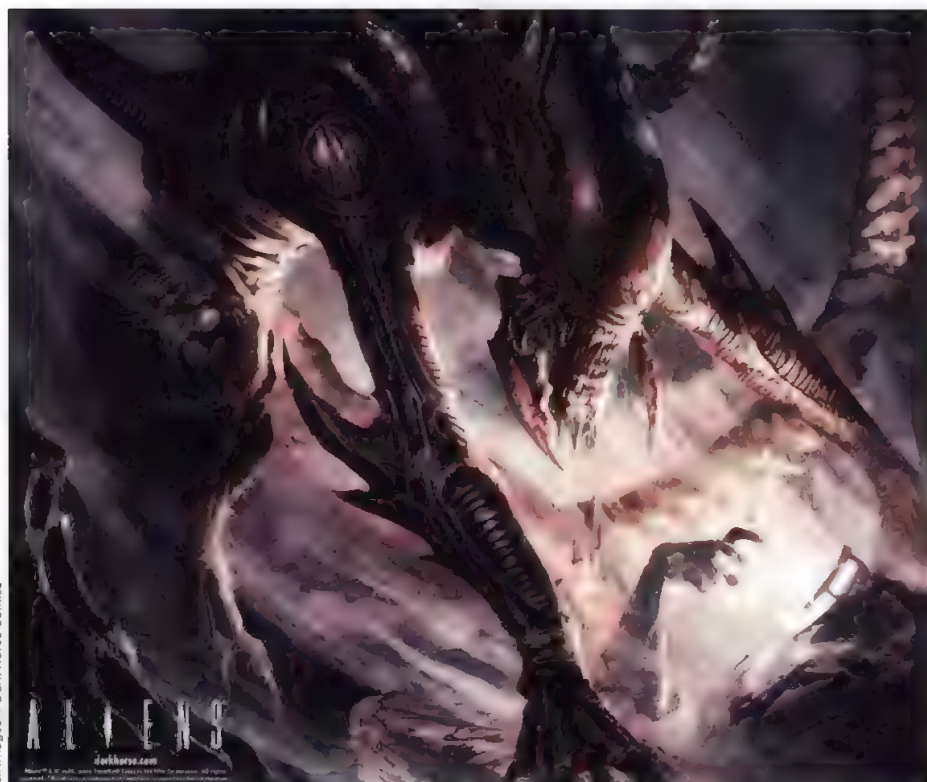
in my teens were the DC *Star Trek* books – and the people writing them obviously had a love of the source material. The best licenses are written by people who have an interest in the subject." Indeed, perhaps even more than DC and Marvel superhero books, TV and movie tie-ins are heavily reliant on being embraced by existing fans. Series that achieve this generally stand the best chance of being a success – as demonstrated by the *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* series currently being published at Dark Horse. »

"A LICENSED STORY HAS TO BE CANONICAL. IF IT ISN'T, WHY BOTHER WITH IT?" TONY LEE

kind. Today, licensed comics remain widespread – with publishers such as IDW, Dark Horse and BOOM! Studios relying particularly heavily on them – and cover a variety of franchises from Pixar movies to 24.

Tony Lee, writer of IDW's ongoing *Doctor Who* series and assorted other spinoff titles, has long been a fan of licensed comics. "The comics that got me back into the genre when I was





2x Images © Dark Horse Comics

Officially marketed as the 'eighth season' of the show, it's overseen and part-written by Joss Whedon himself - and this has paid dividends when it comes to drawing fans of the series into comic shops

KEEPING CANON

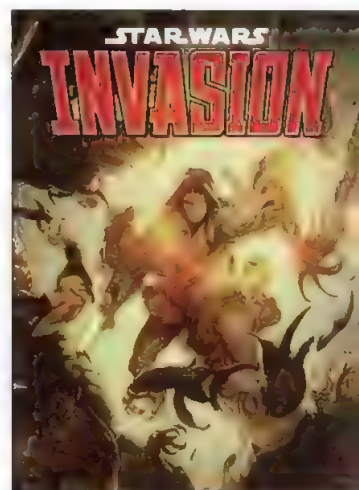
Going after the hardcore fan market, however, brings its own problems - notably, the issue of canon, and the ability of a spinoff to fit in with the continuity established by the 'parent' medium. As a writer, Lee has a firm line on this. "I very much believe that a licensed story has to be canonical.

If it isn't, why bother with it? I want my stories to be relevant, and I take great care to keep things as close to the series as possible. Personally, the appeal is seeing how far I can go while still keeping it canon. I think my crowning achievement so far is to have a scene in *Doctor Who: The Forgotten* where all ten Doctors stand in an old TARDIS console room. And have the BBC and Russell T Davies approve it!" Indeed, the joy can often come from telling stories, or even directly referencing other spinoff series that the TV series can't. "Fans love the links between old and new series, and in my

ABOVE: Dark Horse has done well with the *Aliens* property producing some compelling comics

ABOVE RIGHT: *Star Wars* is another Dark Horse winner. Something to do with Jedi, apparently

RIGHT: Giant transforming robots always make a comic better. Fast



time writing *Doctor Who* I've managed to link both Virgin's *New Adventures* books and Big Finish's audio dramas to the IDW series. Gary Russell, my script editor at the BBC, always asks for fewer continuity references, but at every convention I go to I get asked for more!"

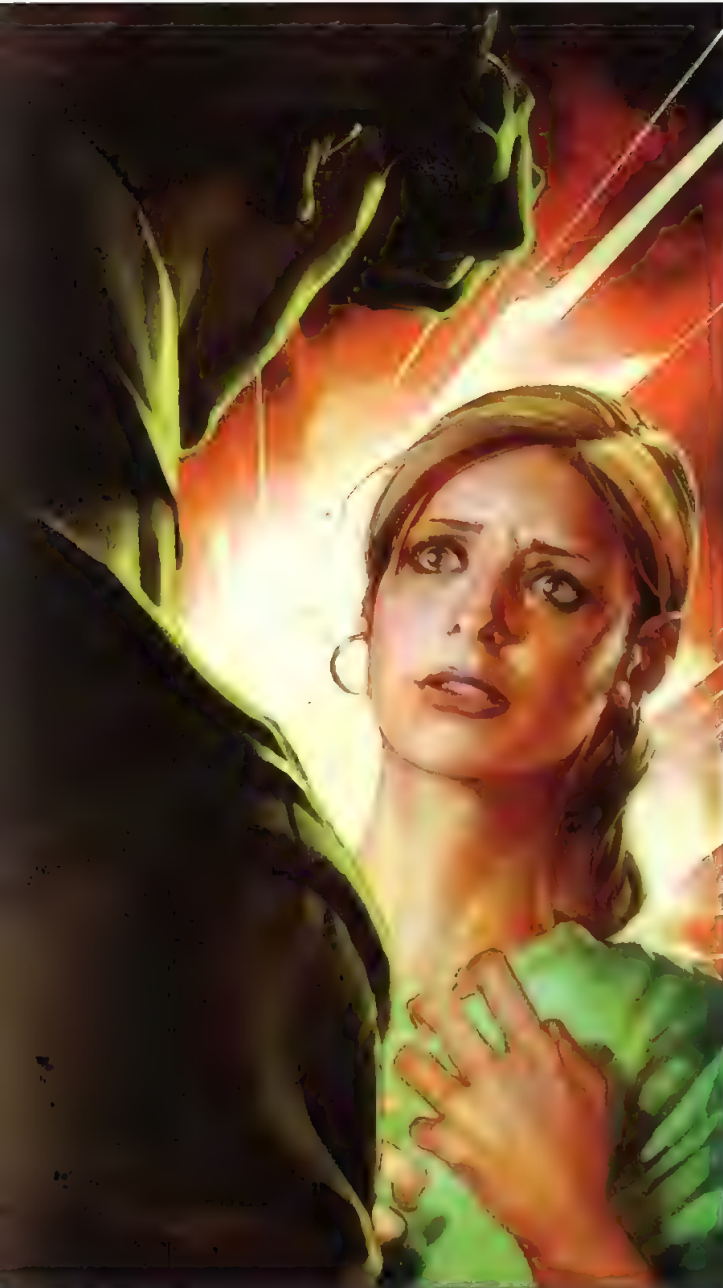
But while certain properties lend themselves well to covering untold tales of adventures from the gaps between what we see onscreen, others can find themselves contradicted by the source material should they unwittingly pre-empt events - a problem experienced by the creators of Dark Horse's *Aliens* spinoff in the late '80s. Set ten years after Cameron's film, they took the surviving characters of Newt and Hicks as a continuation point - and told some entertaining stories of the pair battling aliens. Unfortunately, nobody had told the writers of *Alien 3* this, and when that film opened with the deaths of both of these characters, it instantly rendered the comics impossible to reconcile - at least, until reprints years later that renamed the characters 'Billie' and 'Wilks'.

"MY SCRIPT EDITOR AT THE BBC ALWAYS ASKS FOR FEWER CONTINUITY REFERENCES, BUT AT EVERY CONVENTION I GO TO I GET ASKED FOR MORE!" TONY LEE



Beasts ponders the appearance of Death's Head (see boxout right).

© Marvel Comics



Furthermore, problems can arise when characters from the same universe are licensed to competing publishers. Dark Horse's *Buffy* had been happily rolling alongside the earlier-established *Angel* series, licensed by IDW, without either having to interfere with the other – until the Whedon-driven *Buffy* came out with a major villain reveal that just happened to impact rather heavily on the cast list of *Angel*. This led to disquiet not only from fans concerned that they'd been buying a series that apparently wasn't part of the 'official' story – but also from *Angel* writer Bill Willingham, who publicly complained online.

Rather than driving creators away in fear, however, such challenges can often be part of the fun. Simon Furman, writer of *Transformers* comics

for some 25 years, has had to deal with more continuity issues than most – but has coped admirably with the shifting continuity of multiple 'generations' of the franchise. "I've never minded switching tracks with *Transformers*," he says. "One of the best things about it is its fluidity, its adaptability. I think that's why it's lasted so long. It can transform itself to fit a new generation every now and again." Furman has also benefited from the comics having the rare opportunity to make changes to the franchise, rather than simply reacting to it. "It's always good to be able to put your own mark on something as defined as *Transformers* already was. At first, we pretty much toed the line and didn't make waves, but as I got more confident and found my voice as a writer, we started to try to forge

SUPERMAN VS SONIC VS PREDATOR VS DOCTOR WHO!

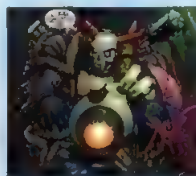
Licensing properties to a variety of companies means that characters from completely different 'universes' can find themselves under one publisher's umbrella. From there, it's a short step to multiple franchise crossovers. Here are some of the more notable – and bizarre.

Aliens/Predator/Superman/Batman



It's all Dark Horse's fault – without its 1990 *Aliens Vs Predator* comic, we'd never have had the two crossover movies. It later join forces with DC to produce a surprisingly good pair of *Batman Vs Predator* stories, and a slightly less good *Superman Vs Aliens*, before coming out with 2007's astonishingly-named *Superman and Batman versus Aliens and Predator*.

Doctor Who/Marvel Universe/Transformers



Although the good Doctor has never actually appeared in a Marvel Universe book himself, he and the Transformers can be said to be part of the same overall fictional sphere courtesy of the character Death's Head, who appeared in comics with both before then heading over to settle down in the Marvel Universe proper. And yes, this does mean that it's theoretically possible for the Doctor to have sat down for a cup of tea with Captain Britain.

Sonic the Hedgehog/Sabrina the Teenage Witch



I wish I could say I were kidding. More famous as a '90s TV series, *Sabrina* actually started life as a comic published by Archie – who also happen to hold the US licence for Sonic comics. So it was only natural that at some point the two characters would cross over, right? Well, possibly not, but it didn't stop them – and so in 1999, Sonic made a guest appearance in issue #28 of *Sabrina's* title. Rumours that Doctor Robotnik was to subsequently join the Riverdale Gang were sadly unfounded.

an identity for the comic. Eventually we got cocky and did the whole origin of the *Transformers* in issue #150, a story that owed nothing to the cartoon series' version!"

BIG NAME FANS

Although the clear draw for any licensed title is the particular franchise involved, they can also be series on which individual creators are able to forge a reputation – Liam Sharp, for example, was considered as much of a draw on his *Gears Of War* and *Aliens* comics as the characters themselves. But while licensed comics don't often

ABOVE: A beautifully-painted *Buffy* cover. Guess who she's looking at. We said guess! (Clue: it's not Clem Or Riley)

FIVE GREAT LICENSED COMICS

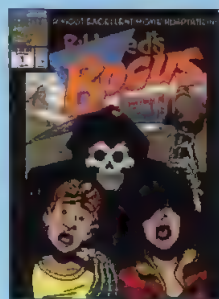
***Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (Dark Horse)**

Aside from being embraced by the original show's fans as an 'official' continuation of the much-loved TV series, *Buffy* has also carved out a credible reputation within the comics field itself, winning an Eisner award for Best New Series in 2008.



***Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventures* (Marvel)**

Writer and artist Evan Dorkin kicked off Marvel's *Bill & Ted* series with an adaptation of the film *Bogus Journey*, before carrying on their adventures with a unique sense of humour and some clever time-travel storytelling. Some might even go so far as to describe it as 'excellent'.



***Doctor Who* (Marvel UK/Panini)**

The ongoing strip in *Doctor Who Magazine*, first launched in 1976, has long been held in high regard, with the BBC even offering the creators the chance to show the 'official' regeneration of Paul McGann's Eighth Doctor to Christopher Ecclestone's Ninth Doctor in 2005.



***The Muppet Show* (BOOM!)**

The hook of Roger Langridge's hilarious series is that, rather than simply being a comic about the Muppet characters, each issue actually takes the format of an episode of *The Muppet Show* itself. The comic's continually inventive with some inspired comedy.



***Simpsons Comics* (Bongo Comics)**

Running continuously since 1993, *Simpsons Comics* has maintained consistent quality where, arguably, even the TV show has failed to. They also even got to do an issue where they brought back one of the series' all-time greatest guest characters, supervillain Hank Scorpio.



CURRENT MARVEL SUPERSTAR MARK MILLAR GOT HIS BREAK ON, OF ALL THINGS, FLEETWAY'S SONIC THE COMIC IN THE EARLY '90S

attract A-list creators at the height of their careers, they can still be a fertile breeding ground for up-and-coming talent. A number of British stars cut their teeth on *Doctor Who Magazine* strips in the '70s and '80s, including Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and artist Dave Gibbons. While Moore has admitted to having little affection for *Who*, Morrison had a clear interest in the series, and was famed for a story that brought back, and killed off, popular '60s companion Jamie MacCrimmon. Meanwhile, current Marvel superstar Mark Millar got his break on, of all things, Fleetway's *Sonic The Comic* in the early '90s. Aside from occasional stabs at the main *Sonic* strip, he also created the popular *Streets Of Rage*-based series.

Licensed comics may be far from challenging the market dominance of mainstream superhero series – in the sales charts for February this year, the highest-ranking licensed book was *Buffy* at #28, with *Star Wars* and Stephen King's *Dark Tower* the only

other titles in the top 100 – but they can nevertheless prove a valuable source of comic sales outside the direct market, as fans of the original franchises flock to bookshops for collected trade paperbacks. They're also a useful way for a fledgling company to build up a reputation – IDW, spurred largely by their library of licensed titles, were the fourth-biggest publisher by sales in 2009 (just ahead of the longer-established Image), and were recently declared the fifth 'premier publisher' by distributors Diamond. And while some may be dismissive of such titles, there's no denying that in expanding the world beyond a small- or big-screen franchise, they plug directly into the most 'fan-pleasing' parts of a reader's brain. As Lee admits, "I've been a fan of *Doctor Who* since I was four years old. And now, I get to tell the stories I've wanted to do since I was a small child. No matter how busy I ever get, I'd write that book until they pulled it out of my cold, dead hands." **CH**

DODGEM LOGIC

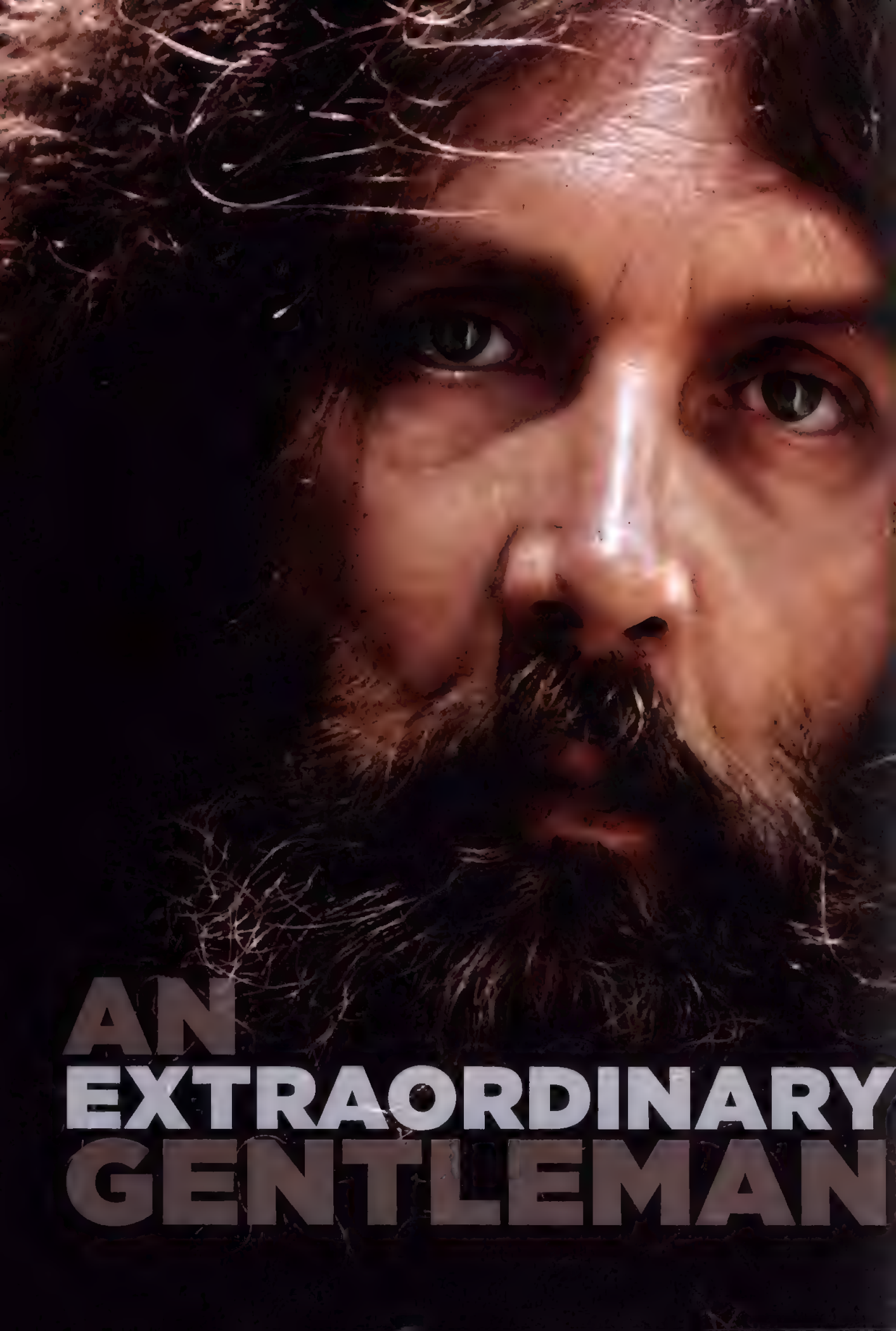
HAVE A SUBTERRANEAN SUMMER!

Welcome to the Subterranean Summer that is Dodgem Logic, a bi-monthly journal of subterranean content for the subterranean price of £3.50. Covering the hottest and funniest culture from the furrowed brow of indie to the furrowed brow of the furrowed brow, Dodgem Logic is a global magazine that will return to its roots from time to time, providing a bit of a steady stream of content and we're even including a basketball team, just like those drug dealers on the 11th! To get an exclusive edition of Dodgem, we've got something special for you, a belly-dancing tour of London and the end of civilization. It's like we're having a party, a bit of something, but we're also tripping. Plus, to our fourth issue, a psychedelic summer special and back issues from the past, now at a special price. Visit www.dodgemlogic.com and get with our frankly amazing program.

Dodgem Logic – an uncomfortable coalition between Good and Evil.

- 22 pages of 100 million underground content for the subterranean price of £3.50.
- Dodgem Logic is a bit of a party, a bit of something, but we're also tripping.
- Plus guerrilla content, including content, just because we're glad to see you.
- Steve Aylett – and his band, and his band, and his band.
- Plus guerrilla content, including content, just because we're glad to see you.
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**AN
EXTRAORDINARY
GENTLEMAN**

Comics are dead, says **Alan Moore**. And he couldn't be happier to be leaving the "creatively bankrupt" sinking ship full of "sub-human cowards." The *Watchmen* writer gives **Michael Molcher** his parting shots at a "dying" industry.

BELOW: A little comic you may have heard of, quite possibly

A

ge has not softened Alan Moore. In fact, it's probably made him sharper around the edges than ever before. For 'sharp', read 'razor'. While anyone else would be donning tinted glasses to glance back smugly over such a fruitful career, Moore seems to have removed his blinkers instead. And what he sees does not make him happy.

He has now opened both barrels on an industry that he believes is willing to laud and make money from his greatest work, *Watchmen*, while simultaneously failing to learn from it for 25 years. The final straw has now arrived in the form of Disney-owned comics giant Marvel announcing that it had cut through decades of copyright wrangles to re-publish Marvelman, a character created by Mick Anglo, who Moore resurrected for Dez Skinn's early '80s comic *Warrior*.

"I've told them to take my name off of it," he says. "I've told them to give the money to Mick Anglo on the grounds that if I'd ever known, if I'd ever been told the truth about his ongoing ownership of the Marvelman copyright, I'd never have written the character in the first place."

Ironically, it was legal threats from Marvel that sparked the years of arguments over the character's ownership. It's an understatement to say that Moore is not a fan...

"I certainly don't want to see my work coming out from an entity like Marvel Comics. I don't want my work associated with the name Marvel," he says. "If I didn't want to be associated with Marvel Comics before they were bought by Walt Disney, then I certainly don't want to be associated with them afterwards. Disney, much like Marvel Comics, has not produced anything that I've thought was attractive since well before *The Jungle Book*."

His ire is similarly aimed at DC, his one-time employers, who have mooted producing 'sequels' to *Watchmen* and his other great work, *V For Vendetta* - both of them already turned into multi-million dollar movie franchises without his involvement. The former is still cited as one of the greatest comic books ever written and one which launched the 'Bam! Pow! Comics aren't just for kids!' graphic novel boom, before sparking years of ill-conceived 'dark and gritty' copycat titles that mistook unrestrained violence and nihilism for narrative depth.



© DC Comics

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In *Watchmen*, Moore pushed the boundaries of what comics were capable of into a strange, dark hinterland where the medium had never really been before. But to see nothing since that pushes those boundaries still further looks, to him, like an industry with no new ideas.

"If that is the best they can do, if Marvel are going to bring out *Marvelman*, if DC are talking about sequels to *V For Vendetta* and *Watchmen*... it isn't much of an industry, is it?" he says. "You'd think if it was any kind of industry, let alone any kind of decent artform... it's a bit appalling that it's not had any ideas of its own for decades."

"I very much doubt that it would be possible for anybody to come up with a comic like *Watchmen* today and have it accepted or nurtured by one of the big companies – that just isn't going to happen. Because, frankly, I think that *Watchmen* probably caused as many problems for the big companies as it rewarded them financially. Certainly, if you look at Gerard Jones's *Men Of Tomorrow* book about the gangster origins of the comic industry, which was written with the full cooperation of DC Comics, you'll notice at the end when it talks about the 1980s the biggest event in the comics world was John Byrne's revamping of Superman.

"There isn't a mention of *Watchmen*. Which suits me fine. If they want to write me out of history, at the moment I'm not much bothered. Quite frankly I'd prefer not to have been so closely associated with American comics."

REFUSAL TO CHANGE

Despite being airbrushed out of history, what's angered Moore more than anything is not just a lack of creative change, but what he sees as the industry's actual aversion and outright resistance to anything that might herald change. Look at the output from Marvel and DC and it's the same characters, mostly rebooted or even resurrected several times. This is creative death, as far as Moore is concerned, but symptomatic of an industry that recycles ideas that pay.

"They don't want to progress and if you do force them, they're out of their comfort zone and go into a state of panic for the next 25 years," says Moore. "Also, I tend to think that is what the stasis of the comics industry is – just endless, pointless revisiting of the same ideas, the same tropes, over and over again. It's a stasis that they enjoy, and I don't think that is purely limited to the superhero comics.

"Perhaps I'm just coming from an uninformed perspective, but I can't think of many books that have been as progressive as *Watchmen* that have appeared since. Which is a bit shameful, in that when I was reading comics in the '60s, and began to see comics from the '40s, I quickly realised how much comics had progressed in 20 years. We're in 2010 and it seems a bit of a poor show if there hasn't been anything as progressive as a comic that came out in 1985.

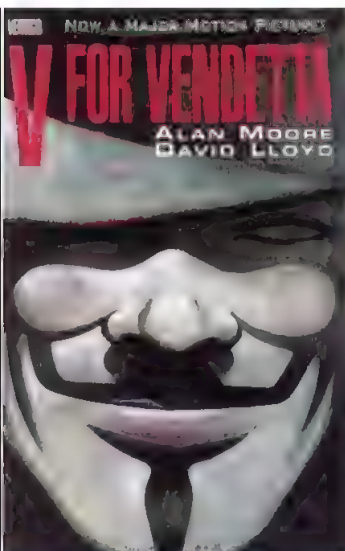
"I haven't read a comic in years but I've not been tempted to. Other than those by friends and loved ones I've not seen anything that has made me want to pick up a comic book. It looks like it's stuck in the late '80s and early '90s and it's just going to be an endless cycle of that material. So I tend to suspect that it was probably only me, and a number of my collaborators, who were actually interested in pushing things forward. I think that the publishers are happier with an unending stasis; I think a lot of the artists and writers are. I tended to feel that, yes, I received a lot of admiration but I also received a lot of suspicion and antagonism that, frankly, I could do without.

"So although I've had a great love of comics as a medium, I belatedly came to realise that the comics industry does not want progress. In fact, it isn't capable of it and it doesn't want it."

ABOVE: Moore's early shorts for 2000 AD remain great fun

RIGHT: Best keep *Lost Girls* away from grandma, if you ask us

“Quite frankly, I’d prefer not to have been so closely associated with American Comics”



He holds up the steady decline of comic book sales during a time when the money being made out of them is higher than ever as proof of his argument. Comics as a medium are deteriorating to the point where they are beyond retrieval, and he believes the big boardroom takeovers of DC and Marvel will only hasten the end.

"It looks to me as if the comics industry is pretty much already getting out of comics," he claims. "The individual pamphlets don't sell as much as the collections. The biggest circulating news I saw coming from DC Warner Brothers last year was that they'd sold the rights to use Superman for some sort of online gambling."

"This is basically the only thing the characters are worth now? They're so debased that they're only useful for franchises - for as long as you can knock out a few more Batman films, a few more Superman films... once that dries up, then what will there be?"

Declining sales and the wringing of every cent of cash from characters speaks of something much deeper in the industry - he suspects that culture is rapidly becoming 'creatively bankrupt', with re-make comics, re-make TV shows and re-make films.

"It looks like there are no creative resources left," he says. "With television, I don't see any indication that the



Marvel Entertainment

majority of the writers know how to write. They don't seem to understand the requirements of resolving your plotlines or having an ending in place probably before you start your first episode. You can almost feel the death of narrative looming - you fear that people will soon be so conditioned to accepting stories that don't go anywhere, and that don't resolve their plotlines, that can be changed at a whim to make it all never have happened. You can imagine that people conditioned to accept those kind of stories might eventually forget that there was any other kind of narrative."

WHAT'S GOING WRONG?

With his every word pored over for some revelation either about a project in the future or some slight from the past, Moore-watching is treated as something of a spectator sport by the comicsphere. We love those little spats, those smatterings of controversy between creators; and Alan has had his fair share, having fallen out with every major comic book publisher over the way they have treated their talent.

The evergreen *V For Vendetta*, with art by the ace David Lloyd

Captain Britain has no need for a fly. Or visible underwear.

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"I choose just not to work with people who behave in the way that the comics industry has undoubtedly behaved since its inception. No matter how much of a friendly tint is put on it, the comics industry has done horrible things to people for the basest of motives, and it continues to do so.

"That is my perception as someone who has worked in the fucking comics industry for something like pushing 30 years. I choose not to work with people like that, and I choose not to work with people who are prepared to work with people like that."

He believes the rot began back in the 1960s, when comic book writers – "They were what you'd call 'hacks' these

days. I hear 'hack' as someone who's just doing their job, surviving and making a living" – tried to form a union to ask for better working conditions.

"To which the companies said 'that's all very interesting, you're all fired,'" says Moore. "And the companies then got in a new generation of writers who were comic fans who would practically have paid to write these superhero sagas; they weren't actually writers, they were comic fans who knew all of the continuities of all of these characters, and turned out largely unoriginal stories within the parameters of what had gone before. Since then, the industry – and increasingly I think the same is true of television and film – has been taken over by fans.

"I think that's a dangerous state for the industry and, like I say, because so much of the medium depends on the industry it's a dangerous thing for the medium. I mean, I started out as a comics fan and I was also a fan of various other things, but I hope that the stuff that I've brought to my writing is my sensibilities as an adult, who has a life outside of the fan obsession. In the same way that those original writers did.

"I've noted the great disparity between these great heroic characters who would risk their lives in fighting injustice and the people who write, draw and publish them who, in the main, if they were to come across a completely obvious example of injustice they would look the other way because they don't want to upset the comic companies because they depend on them for work, and they can't imagine working in any other medium, because they're fans. Those kind of people are perhaps one of the reasons why it's not doing either party any good if I stay in contact with the comics industry. It's only going to get out of order and probably upset them, and it wouldn't be very enjoyable for me."

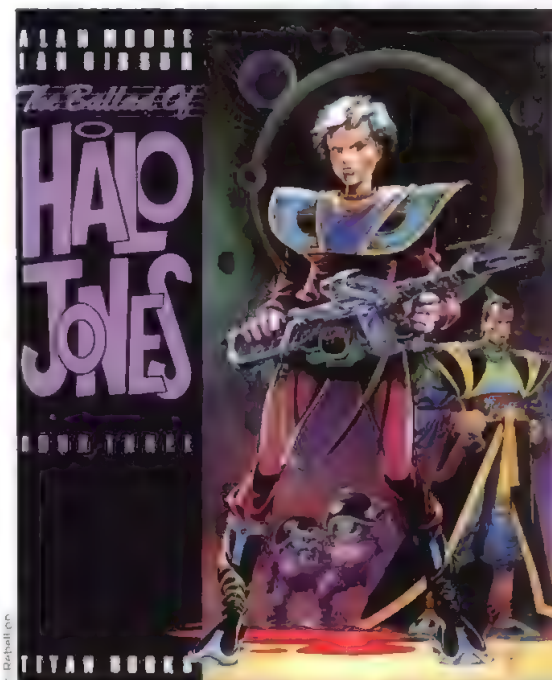
DAMNING APPRAISAL

All of this and the arguments over last year's *Watchmen* film have left him with the impression that, on some levels at least, the comic book industry is a "hopelessly corrupt" one and that some involved are "pretty much sub-human," he says.

"That was my appraisal. Obviously, I'm not a medical man so couldn't swear to that. But that was the way they

Halo Jones remains sadly unfinished

Who could that bearded man be? Eh? Hmmm?





The Top 10 spin-off *Smax* was a wonderfully wry look at the worlds of fairy tales and high fantasy

... Knockabout publish Moore's *Dodgem Logic* magazine in the UK

seemed to me – that their behaviour was sub-human, that I despaired of the parents that had brought them up like that. And it didn't seem as if this behaviour was thought to be unusual. When that seems to be the attitude of most of the creative community as well, I started to feel isolated."

This has all led him to a conclusion he never thought he'd reach – the comics industry is dying and he's leaving.

"I really wouldn't expect to see comics as we, or at least as I, currently understand them to be around much more than a few years," he says. "I can quite happily leave it to go its merry way and do what it wants because I don't think it's going anywhere good. I don't think you can sustain something like that unless you've got constant invention, constant new ideas. After the *Watchmen* incidents, I pretty much didn't want anything to do with the comics industry apart from the ones that I own myself. Other than those things, that is pretty much it."

So that's it, folks. No more Moore... Now, he's mooted this in interviews recently but interviewers seem to gloss over it, almost as if they think he's joking. He's noticed that too, and he's most definitely not.

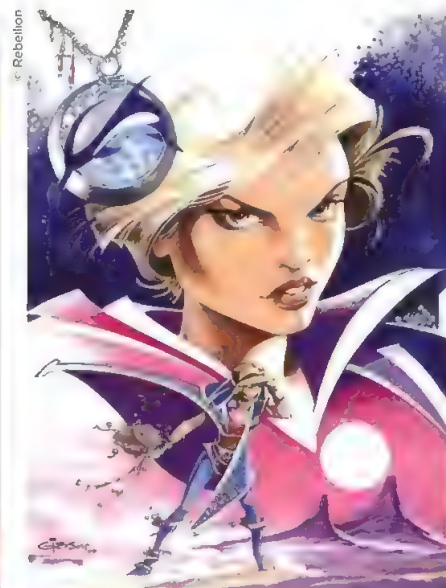
"People don't seem to be able to grasp the fact that actually I didn't start out as somebody who was working in comics. It's just what I ended up doing and was one of my various interests."

"I think that people who refuse to believe that I would ever be interested in anything other than comics are the people for whom comics are their entire world. There's an insularity which is claustrophobic after a while."

So often overlooked, his non-comics works are more intriguing and, creatively at least, more rewarding. He's following up his first novel *Voice Of The Fire* ("even though it was nothing to do with comics and, thus, tended to be overlooked by the industry, it was one of the best things I think I've done") with the massive experiment in hyper-local psychogeography *Jerusalem* nearing an end.

Music has always played a large part in his work and a series of songs he's written with musician Joe Brown

“After the *Watchmen* incidents, I pretty much didn't want anything to do with the comics industry”



are to be released with music from Brown's band, the Retro Spankee. In addition, the *Moon And Serpent* 'occult recordings' of prose poetry set to music with Tim Perkins, with whom Moore is now working on a project for a museum in Oxford, are to be collected together for the first time ("You wouldn't call it 'greatest hits'... Six albums, that's not bad - it's better than the Stone Roses did! And we didn't take five years to do the second one either!"). In the same magical vein, he and Steve Moore are "about a third of the way" through producing *The Moon And Serpent Bumper Book Of Magic*.

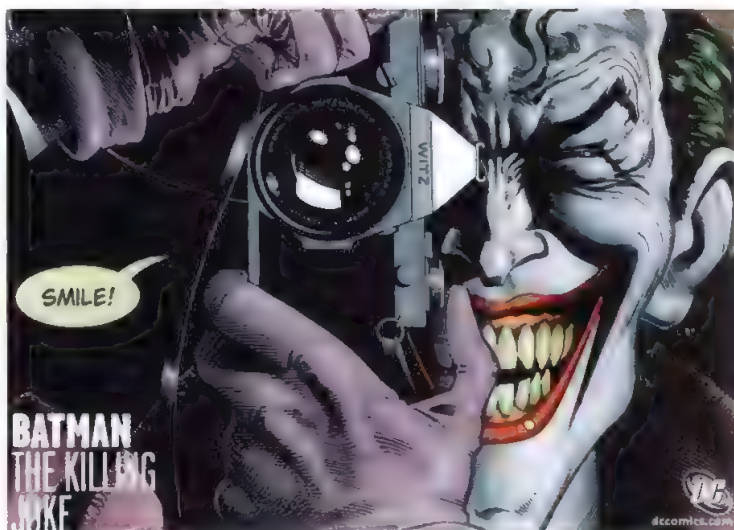
There's the rumoured opera about 16th century occultist John Dee with Gorillaz star Damon Albarn, and he's also been popping up at comedian Robin Ince's anti-Creationist School For Gifted Children performances alongside an absolutely bewildering array of comics, writers and musicians.

FREE FROM COMICS

He becomes suddenly animated when talking about *The Unearthing*. Based on a story about Steve Moore's "interesting and eerie life" he wrote for London Orbital writer Iain Sinclair's anthology *London: City of Disappearances*, it has become a book illustrated with images by award-winning photographer Mitch Jenkins, a performance and now a box-set containing CDs, vinyl, scripts, posters, videos, and a packet of cactus seeds...

"Cacti were the main preoccupation of Steve's late brother, Chris, who was alive when we were taking the photos for *Unearthing* but has passed away since," says Moore. "Since his enthusiasm for cactuses is part of the story, we thought it'd be nice."

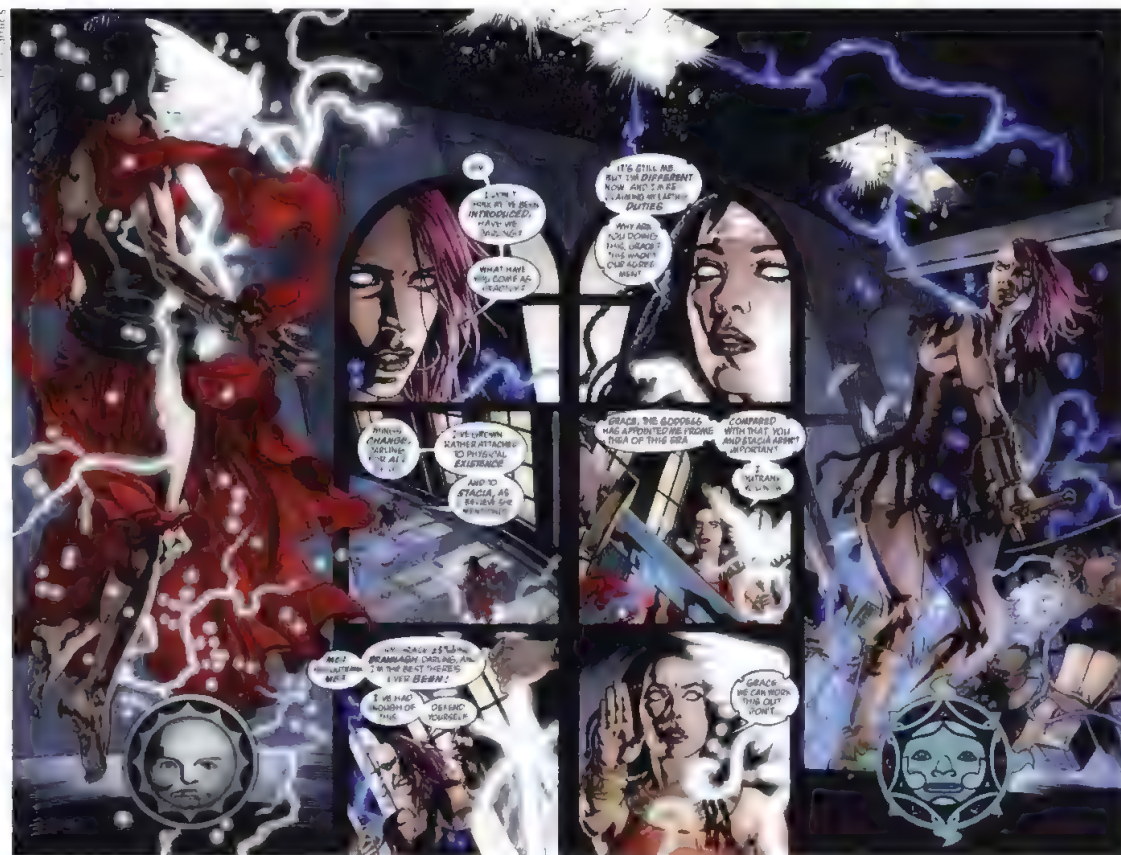
"It's extraordinary - it's a combination of words and images in a way that I've never done it before. I'm very excited about it. I'm not sure what you'd call it, but it's a kind of multimedia extravaganza based upon a very, very



odd story. Not sure how that will go down, but we just want to see it in existence."

This is the essence of Moore's new direction, away from the straitjacket of a comics industry he doesn't believe understands him, and back to his roots as a creative man dabbling with many different projects.

"The background that I initially came from was the Northampton 'arts lab' background, a very anarchic and eclectic, spontaneous set-up that just seemed to blossom all over England in the 1960s and I was interested in performing, in song writing, in drawing, writing - it was purely that comics is what I ended up being able to do professionally."



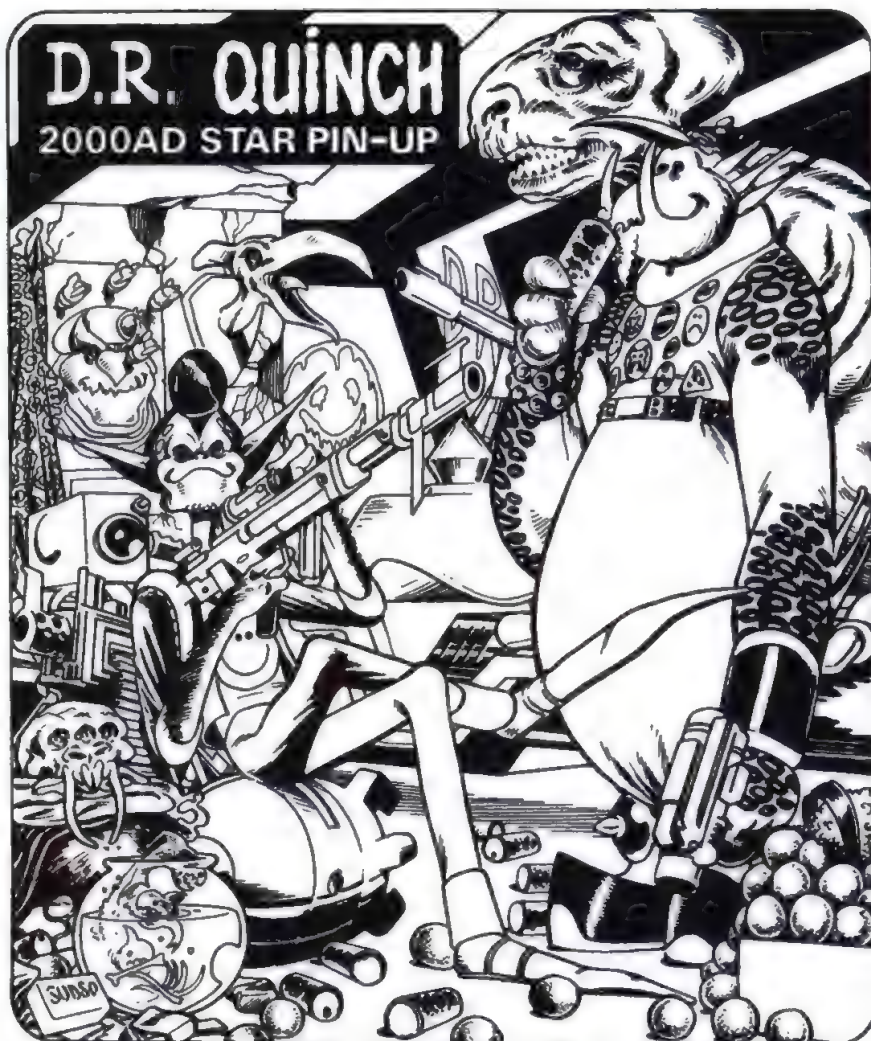
The Killing joke remains a fan favourite. Above: Boland art

Moore and Moore's *Bumper Book Of Magic* has yet to be released





© Rebellion



"Now, even once I'd done that and established myself as a comic book writer, anybody looking back at my career would see that I've done quite a lot of other stuff on the side all the time. It's just good to have a lot of different strings to my bow. It feels... healthy and very refreshing."

This renaissance may well have been sparked by his work on *Dodgem Logic*, his underground-style 'zine which launched last year, and has taken him back to his pre-comics roots as a writer and artist for underground music magazine *Sounds*.

"*Dodgem Logic* is the magazine that I failed to produce back in 1975," he chuckles. "And it struck me last year that, for a number of reasons, we could do with a good underground 'zine. I didn't see anything that had the same spirit, I saw lots of very slick magazines that were mostly full of advertising."

"I really wanted a magazine that wasn't affiliated with anyone and wasn't afraid of losing advertisers, so could say exactly what it wanted. At the moment in England that would seem to be a fairly rare commodity. We kind of threw *Dodgem Logic* together but I'm really glad we did and I'm really pleased with the results. We're starting to grow into the kind of magazine we envisaged, in fact it's turning out better than we imagined, much more glorious and spectacular."

Although slickly produced, the 'zine's anarchic design and articles on a diverse assortment of subjects capture the free, experimental spirit of the '70s that so inspired Moore to become a writer in the first place.

It has in particular turned attention to the Spring Boroughs area of Northampton, where Moore grew up, one of the most deprived areas in the UK and one which Moore says has been "shamefully neglected." Thanks to *Dodgem Logic*, Christmas hampers went to local sheltered housing residents; the local basketball team, the Northampton Kings, have snazzy new vests; and two local schools will have facilities during the summer holidays to stop youngsters "ending the holidays with ASBOs, serious injuries or criminal records."

"That feels good," admits Moore. "However *Dodgem Logic* ends up, it will have accomplished what I set out to accomplish, which wasn't very much but it was to draw

attention to that neighbourhood and other ones like it.

"Out of a mix of politics and just sheer stupidity, *Dodgem Logic* has now accomplished something. And maybe it will put the idea in people's heads that they could do something similar."

Perhaps the disbelief over him leaving the comics industry comes from the fact that he'll still be publishing comics, albeit on his own terms.

The rest of his *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* will still be published by Top Shelf along with his *Bojeffries Saga* with Steve Parkhouse, which will round off with a 24-page 'after-they-were-famous' story that brings the bizarre family of working class werewolves, vampires and monsters bang up-to-date.

But gone are the days when Moore would craft such loving tributes to his favourite characters as *Whatever Happened To The Man Of Tomorrow*.

"I'm still writing *League* with Kevin, because the comics medium is one I will always enjoy... along with all the other things that I do. It's just that I've refined it down to a level I can get what I want out of it personally, which is largely a level that is completely removed from the context

“Out of a mix of politics and sheer stupidity, *Dodgem Logic* has accomplished something”

“I miss it.” If it wasn't for *Swamp Thing*, we'd have no Vertigo

“I miss it.” The anarchic *DR* and *Quinch*. How we miss them

of the comics industry at large and just about everything connected with it."

He has now finished writing the final episodes of the epic, which began as a steampunk ride through 19th century literature. The third and final volume, 'Century', is split into three, with the second set during the 1960s and the last, called 'Let It Come Down', after the Spiritualised album of the same name, set in 2009.

"It's going to be a great book and it's going to be finished when Kevin's finished it. I certainly am not going to rush him – he's doing a marvellous job. If it comes out two months late, but it's the job that me and Kevin want it to be, then that's what happens. I think that readers in the future won't mind when it was released, they'll thank us for taking the time doing it in a way that it's still worth reading in a few years time."

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© Rebellion



Packed with contemporary detail, the 2009 instalment will include references to Orlando returning from the still-dragging-on war in Qu'mar, which is *The West Wing's* surrogate for Iraq, with posters for Driveshaft in record shop windows, which is a reference to *Lost*, and even some allusions to *Entourage*.

"There's a good bit I'm very pleased with," he says. "There's a television programme about the forthcoming elections, and how the Labour Prime Minister, Tom Davis, is currently beleaguered and has had to call back into office his political fixer Malcolm Tucker."

"There's a bit on the television in the background where I actually had to compose a stream of Malcolm Tucker swearing, which is a lot harder than it looks. In counterpoint, one of the characters in the foreground is talking in Shakespearean iambic couplets. The Malcolm Tucker swearing was a lot more difficult to write, because the swearing in *The Thick Of It* is a brilliant!

"I tried it out on Chris Addison when I met him at one of the Bloomsbury Theatre gigs and he put his seal of approval on it and said it sounded like authentic *The Thick Of It* swearing."

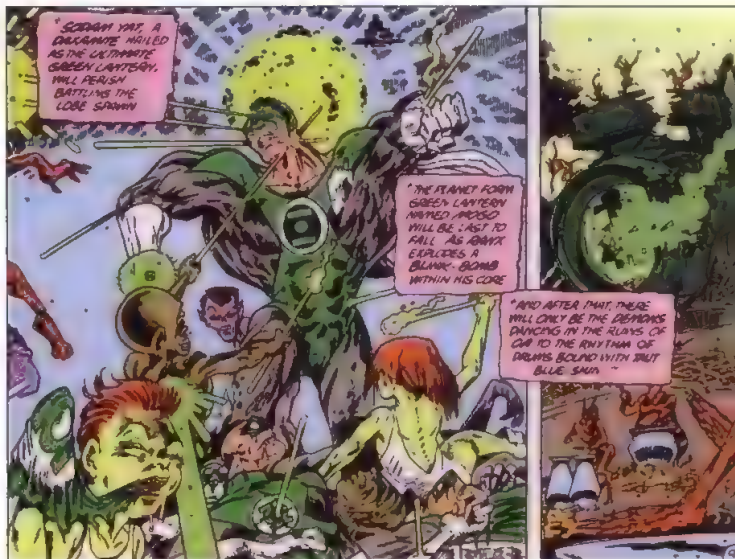
DOING IT ON HIS TERMS

Part of his decision to leave comics has also been fuelled by the reception to *The Black Dossier* – not just threatened legal action over characters not yet out of copyright, but also DC publishing it "as if it was the third book of the *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which it wasn't."

"People seemed to think 'Why have they done a third book of the *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* that's got all this text and writing in it?'" says Moore. "So, yeah, it's perhaps a feeling that my work really doesn't belong anywhere in the mainstream comics industry. I don't think it's what they want. I don't think what they want is what I want. So, y'know, I'm off to pastures new... or rather, pastures old."

Moore feels that many in the post-*Watchmen* gold rush completely missed the fact that, more often than not, comic books are just for kids. If those kids are now grown up but the comics they read haven't changed along with them, what is left is nothing more than juvenile nostalgia. Moore once lovingly crafted odes to his favourite characters, like *Whatever Happened To The Man Of*

© Rebellion



“The average age of the comics audience is in the forties, and it's the same stories, only not as well written”



Tomorrow, but if comics won't grow up with him he'll just have to put them aside.

"I'm back where I was in the '60s, and I have many of my '60s idols around me," he says, "so it's a good place to be. Certainly a lot more enjoyable than doing the *Fantastic Four* or the *Justice League*. I'm too old for that.

"Yes, I'm too old for superheroes. When I first fell in love with superheroes I was seven, they were wonderful creations for seven or 13-year-old kids. That was all they were ever meant to be. And now the average age of the comics audience is in the forties, and it's still the same characters, still the same stories, only not as well written."

So he's back working the way he's always enjoyed working – a number of disciplines, a number of different ways of working that keeps him fresh. "Comics are still a part of that but it'll be on my own terms, without the restrictions of the industry. They're entirely artificial restrictions, they were invented by people I have no respect for the intelligence of. And I don't see what possible for reason I'd have to want to work within those confines, not while there's all this great stuff out here in the real world, or at least in my version of the real world. I think at this late stage I have finally extricated myself from that technicolour quagmire and I'm very much the happier.

"It does feel like a return to the possibilities of those arts lab days. So I'm riding into the sunset. But it's a very enjoyable ride. There's things that I'm more interested in than comics that are luckily plentiful and abundant." 

The mighty Kevin O'Neil worked with Moore on a *Green Lantern* strip

Which you can find collected in the above anthology

RIGHT: Tom Strong, Moore's pulp-era hero created for America's Best Comics





MONSTROUS



RETROSPECTIVE

GREEN LANTERN/ GREEN ARROW

The teaming up of a cosmic law-enforcer and an archer seemed the stupidest idea in comics history – but it made history. Sean Egan tells the story of the revolutionary *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*...

The idea seemed absurd. That Green Lantern was going to get a new co-star in his DC title from the April 1970 issue wasn't the problem. Many was the comic fan of the time, though, who guffawed in derision at the choice: Green Arrow. Green Lantern was a man who could literally fly the cosmos, while Green Arrow was a guy wielding a bow. Clearly, the characters had been welded together simply because they both had green in their names. Only garbage could result from this mismatch. Yet, what resulted over the following year-and-a-half was not garbage but a landmark sequence of publications, which, by bringing intelligent, focused social commentary to comics, created a new paradigm for the medium, shattering the perception that it was merely for kids.

It all started when artist Neal Adams approached Julius Schwartz, editor of *Green Lantern*, to ask if he could

get in a few issues on the title. Adams recalls, "He said, 'Well you'd better do 'em soon because they're going to be cancelling the book. Who do you want to work with? You want to work with Denny?' That sounded good." The Denny in question was Dennis O'Neil, whose late-sixties work on Batman titles with Adams had hauled the Caped Crusader back from the brink of camp buffoonery and returned him to his original dark menace. "Neal and I were flavours of the week," says O'Neil.

"Julie said it couldn't be more silly", was Adams' reaction when subsequently informed by Schwartz that he and O'Neil had come up with the idea of a Green Lantern and Green Arrow book. However, there was method in the apparent madness. Says O'Neil, "The green was an accident, and I don't think a particularly fortuitous one. We needed someone to engage in dialogue with Green Lantern, because he was, in my conception, like a cop –

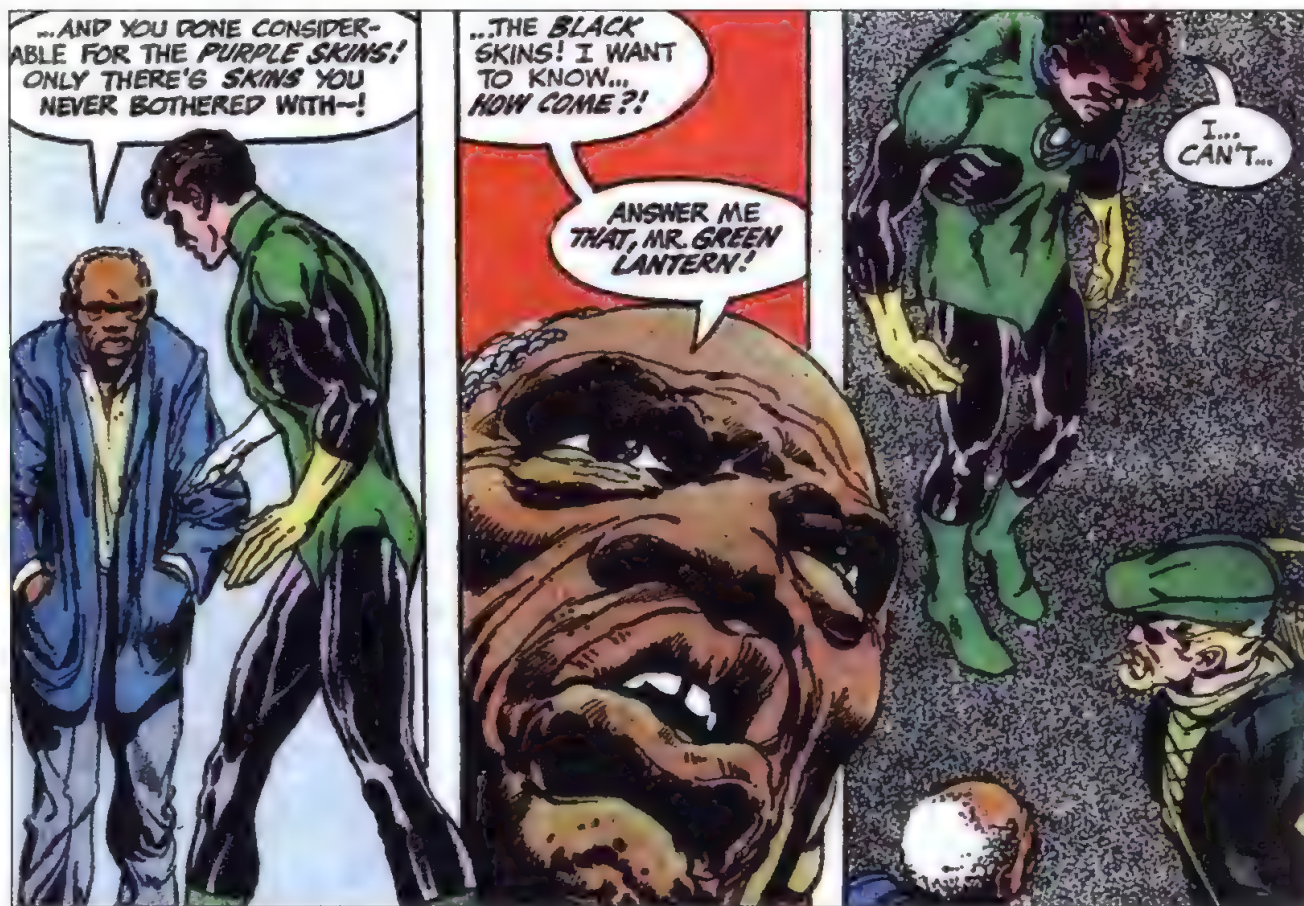
his intentions are pristine, his character is pristine, but he obeys orders without question. We needed a rebel."

DOWN TO EARTH

"I didn't want to create something. Looking around, there was this character who'd been around since the forties and yet he was kind of a blank slate because nobody had paid much attention to him." O'Neil needed the leftist yin of Oliver Queen (Green Arrow) to the conservative yang of Hal Jordan (Green Lantern) because he had decided to send the latter on a road trip across America to encounter the obverse of the chocolate box image that Jordan – like much of the country – had of it at the time. Those detecting the influence of the movie *Easy Rider* from the previous year would not be mistaken. "That and the beatniks, *On The Road* in particular," says O'Neil, also nodding to the new journalism of Norman Mailer and the »

ABOVE: Green Arrow, sticking it to The Man. Yeah! Righteous!

LEFT: Remember, kids, drugs are bad for you



"GREEN LANTERN'S TRADITIONAL OATH WAS NOW FOLLOWED WITH CAVEATS LIKE, 'I USED TO SPEAK THAT OATH WITH PRIDE...'"

new 'literary' science fiction writers like Moorcock and Delaney.

The title became – at least on the cover – *Green Lantern Co-Starring Green Arrow* with #76, an issue that saw Hal Jordan undergo a crisis of self-belief as he rescued a man under attack only to realise he was a slum landlord attempting to evict his tenants to ensure a big payday. Some home truths were made clear to Lantern – a

believer in the laws that protected the likes of the landlord – by Green Arrow. Lantern was also confronted by an elderly black man who demanded he explain why he showed obsequiousness to the blue-skinned Galactic Guardians of the planet Oa, who appointed the universe's various Green Lantern lawmen, while he did nothing for black humans. Lantern could only respond, head hung, "I... can't." Though he and Arrow brought the landlord to justice, unease lingered in Lantern's mind. The blue skins, noting this, gave him a leave of absence and, accompanied by one of their number, Lantern and Arrow made for the nation's highways in a truck, "searching for a special kind of truth... searching for themselves..."

This journey from conviction in authority to paroxysms of doubt might seem to sophisticated palettes to occur in an absurdly truncated timeframe, and the psychology involved contrived, but for comic books in 1970 it was revolutionary; not even Stan Lee's groundbreakingly flawed superheroes

at Marvel had been anything other than rock solid in their perception, let alone pursuit, of justice.

DIFFICULT TIMES

The 'discovering America' idea was abandoned after a few issues, but the exploration of social issues continued as the pair and their Oan minder encountered poverty, oppression of American Indians, an unfair trial deliberately redolent of the 'Chicago Seven' case, overpopulation (albeit on an alien world), environment-wrecking corporations, and drug pushers. In each issue, Green Lantern's traditional recitation of the "No evil shall escape my sight..." oath that accompanied his power ring recharge was now followed by thought bubble caveats like, "I used to speak that oath with pride..."

"For the most part the editorial at DC Comics, and the business end, didn't know what we were doing until we did it," says Adams of work that some in authority might have balked at. O'Neil: "The book was floundering, it was gonna die, so there wasn't a whole lot to lose." For Adams, who had thought he'd be merely imitating his predecessor Gil Kane's traditional hero, there was everything to gain: "We could now go ahead and ramp the game up a little bit and kick a little ass."



ABOVE: Yeah, you might have a fancy 'power ring' but your racial awareness could do with some work

BELOW: Could it be Jesus himself, returned? The answer is... no. We think





HELL HATH NO FURY

Green Lantern/Green Arrow didn't hit every target it aimed for...

Only one right-on cause failed to elicit sympathy from Denny O'Neil: issue #82's storyline about harpies and man-hating Amazons didn't seem to indicate an affinity with Women's Liberation as feminism was then called. O'Neil explains, "I was not emotionally ready to deal with Women's Liberation and I wouldn't be for about five years. I think that conflict is really apparent in that story. I tackled it because I thought I ought to." He describes the result as "a dismal low-point in my career."



Adams is full of praise for O'Neil's work: "Personally I think his writing on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* was better by far than the Batman work." Up to a point, O'Neil returns the compliment, talking of "a sensationally good job" by Adams and citing the last three panels of issue #76 wherein the trio set off on their journey as "still a high water mark in comic art." However, O'Neil's feelings about Adams are bittersweet. "I got one or two surprises along the way when things had been changed," he laments. A scene in issue #86 in which Arrow's ward Speedy socked him in the jaw was introduced by Adams, while an out-of-character vengeful

BELOW: Do you think they ever get sick of the colour green?



destruction of a plane by Lantern in #89 was included in deference to Adams against O'Neil's better instincts. Meanwhile, courtesy of the artist, the villains in #83 had faces suspiciously similar to those of then President Richard Nixon and his Vice President Spiro Agnew, about which O'Neil says, "I don't know what I think about it." One positive outcome of Adams' role-straying, though, was the startling sight in issue #87 of a black Green Lantern. Adams informed Schwartz that the substitute Green Lantern of Earth should not be the Aryan gym teacher Guy Gardner. Adams recalls his entreaty: "Julie, have you ever watched the Olympics? How often do you see a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant on all three of those steps? It's Chinese, it's a black man, it's a mix."

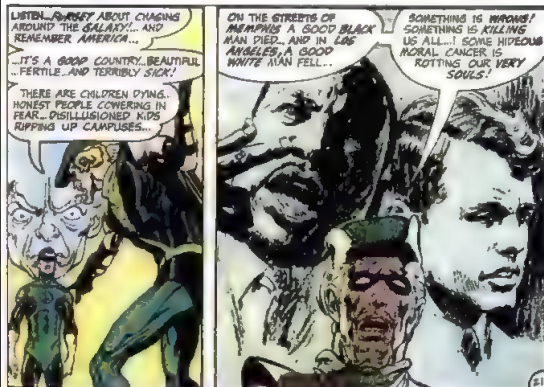
MIXED REACTIONS

There was some negative feedback to the series, including abusive mail, talk of books in certain communities not making it off the delivery boxcar and a threat of a ban from the Governor of Florida should the Vice President be insulted again. Part of this was clearly a perceived concern about the brainwashing of the innocent. O'Neil says he didn't feel that he might be abusing his position of responsibility.

"In the culture wars, the other side plays a lot dirtier than us liberals." However, he also makes the point: "We emphatically did not want to advance a political agenda or a social agenda. I didn't have solutions... We said from the get-go that we wanted to create a dialogue."

As well as the brickbats, there was a heart-warming positive reaction. Adams: "We got letters from high school students and college students who had never read comic books up to that time. Suddenly we were getting intelligent, well-thought out responses, and it was a shock to everybody."

The series' most sensational story spanned issues #85 and #86, when Arrow discovered that his neglect of Speedy had turned the sidekick into a heroin addict. By what O'Neil says is "pure coincidence", it was printed just after the famous *Amazing Spider-Man* drugs trilogy. O'Neil says of Stan Lee's story, "There was really nothing in it that was radical and I don't even know that he specified what drug was the problem." It was a rare example for the time of the generally staid DC trumping cutting edge Marvel. The Speedy story really put *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* on the map. "We got a letter from the Mayor of New York commenting on it," Adams recalls.



JUST SAY NO

...s work for Neal Adams. Extraordinary as the writing was on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, the art was frequently its equal. Among Neal Adams' stunning imagery in the run was a harrowing page in #85 depicting the nightmares experienced by the two heroes during a forcibly induced drug trip, and an issue #81 page that melded the cosmos with Lantern's torso. Says Adams, "I'm as much a designer as I am an artist."



O'Neil: "Neal and I found ourselves going on talk shows and stuff like that. We had attained respectability in the disreputable medium because we had a mayor to say we were good guys."

Despite the media exposure, sweeping the board at the inaugural Academy comics awards and enduring acclaim, on one level *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* was a failure – the book was cancelled with the May 1971 issue. O'Neil seems almost glad of the run being brought to a close: "We had dealt with everything that personally concerned me as a citizen, a father and a veteran, and the book was in danger of becoming 'Cause of the Month' comics, which I don't think would have been good." For three more months, the two green heroes were to be found as back-ups in *Flash*, in a story arc that saw Oliver Queen hang up his quiver in anguish at causing a man's death, and was character-driven in a way that most comics – especially DC's – rarely were at that time. O'Neil: "I don't know that I was consciously trying to achieve it, but it is a coda to that grand experiment. It was a good way to go out."

But that was nothing like the end. Within months of the cancellation of the title, the O'Neil/Adams *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* stories were reprinted in book form, something very unusual for the time. Reprints and further anthologies have followed



ABOVE: Neal Adams really hit it out of the park – and the cosmos

down the decades, as has a legendary status on comics' timeline.

BREAKING BARRIERS

O'Neil: "We thought of this as an impermanent artform. We certainly didn't think it would be published in hardcover thirty years later." O'Neil is enough of a comics scholar to know that *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* was not the first comic book to address social issues. "We get the credit for that a lot but we don't deserve it," he says. However, he also knows that, though early Superman denounced evil capitalists and EC comics satirised

racism, his and Adams' work broke its own barriers. O'Neil: "There had been times when comics had touched on those things. What we did was take two high-profile characters and consciously made the social issues the centrepiece of the series."

"We were pretty much doing what the world we were living in was about," says Adams of the series. "We were young lions who thought enough alike to make good literature, if you can call comic books literature – and I can."

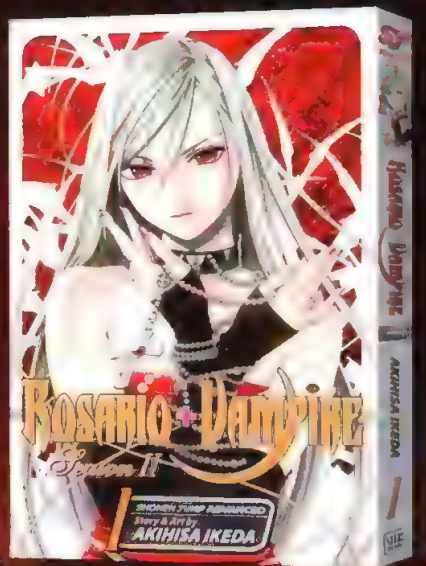
Thanks to O'Neil and Adams' *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, so can many more people. **CH**

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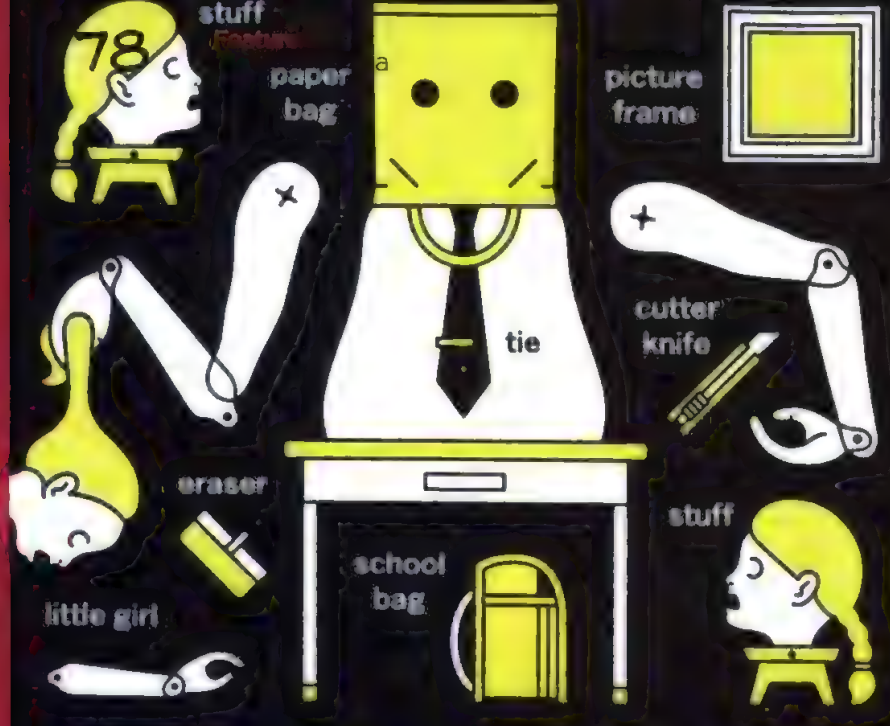


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11

KUROSAGI delivery service of corpse

黒鷲死体宅配便

write 大塚英志 comic 山崎峰水

STAFF A



Psychic
[イタコ]: 死体との対話

STAFF B



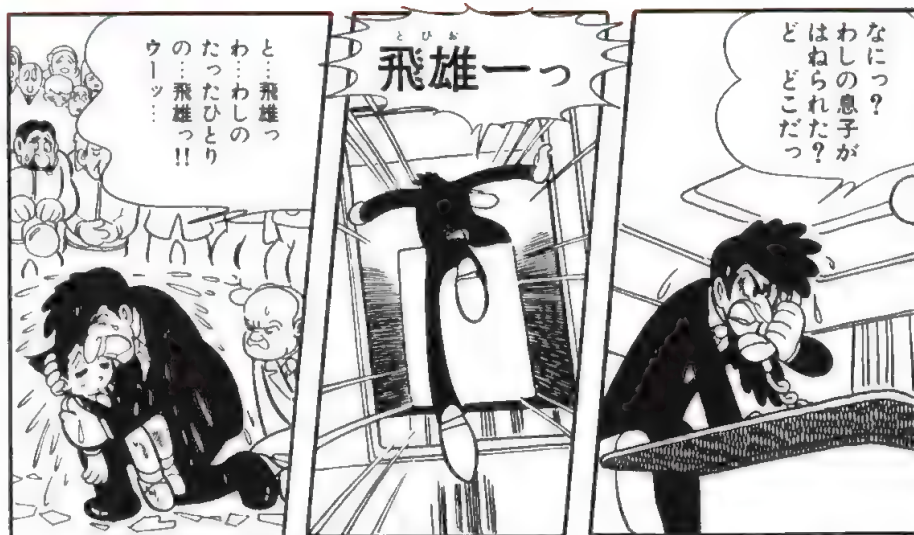
Dowsing
[ダウジング]: 死体の捜索

STAFF C



Hacking
[ハッキング]: 情報の収集

死体の願い、叶えます。



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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

MANGA

How do you explain the world's most vibrant and inclusive comics culture? Eisner Award nominee **Helen McCarthy** looks at a global phenomenon

Back in 1983, when Frederik L Schodt's groundbreaking book *Manga! Manga! The World Of Japanese Comics* appeared, book shop clerks and librarians didn't know where to file it: art, comics, ethnography? Some were convinced it belonged in the bin. Few English-speaking people had heard of manga.

Today, bookshops and libraries offer masses of translated Japanese comics, and academics write about them. Yet to some, manga remain a mystery. For the facts behind the fiction, read on...

MANGA MYTHBUSTING

Myth #1: 'Manga style' art is unique and definable.

There is no such thing as 'manga style'. Manga is simply the Japanese word for comics. Japanese artists work in many styles, from the crudeness of 'King Terry' Johnson's *Beach Paradise* to the sophisticated line-and-wash of Hiroaki Samura's *Blade Of The Immortal*. If Japanese comics have a defining characteristic, it's their narrative pacing.

Myth #2: Manga developed in isolation from other comics and cultures.

In 1853, the United States forced Japan to open to foreigners. New art, science and ideas flooded in. After 250 years of isolation, many Japanese people were intensely curious about the outside world and soaked up these influences. Two magazines – Briton Charles Wirgman's *Japan Punch* and Frenchman Georges Bigot's *Toba-e* – brought a European influence to Japanese comic art in the late 1800s. Rakuten Kitazawa, Japan's first professional cartoonist, learned to draw cartoons from Australian Frank A Nankivell. Ippei Okamoto published American cartoon strips in Japan in the early 1900s.

Myth #3: Osamu Tezuka invented manga art.

Tezuka himself frequently debunked that one, talking about his favourite childhood manga by Bontaro Shaka, Ryuichi Yokoyama and Yokoi Fukujiro. Kitazawa was the first artist to use 'manga' in the modern sense for graphic narrative art, and Katsushika Hokusai published his sketchbooks as 'manga' from 1818.

ABOVE: Tezuka's *Astro Boy* is a long standing favourite

LEFT: This is a horror manga first published in *Kadokawa Mystery*

Myth # 4: Osamu Tezuka Invented girls' manga.

Girls' manga were established in newspapers and periodicals before the first girls' manga magazine, *Shojo Club*, started in 1923.

Myth #5: Everyone in Japan reads manga.

Well, not quite, but despite a steady decline in sales over the past decade, manga still sell strongly in their homeland. As in France or Spain, comics are an accepted part of life and you can find one to suit almost every reader. In March 2010, the Japan External Trade Organisation's newsletter reported that "Manga make

up a full 20% of magazine sales and 27% of total book sales in the country." 21st-century Japanese are just as likely to read manga online or on their mobile phones, which is a growing problem for print publishers.

SECRET HISTORY

Many fans point to the 12th-century anthropomorphic animal scrolls attributed to Buddhist monk Sojo Toba or Hokusai as early examples of manga, but few outside Japan have heard of the great pre-war and wartime manga artists. Yet manga were so successful that character merchandising was already well underway. Stickers, toys and products depicting characters like Grim Natwick's Betty Boop and Suehiro Tagawa's Norakuro were on sale in the 1930s, and popular manga characters were animated, starting the symbiotic relationship with tie-ins that's a key part of both industries today.

The war brought a major break in the development of manga. Only artists who toed the government line and produced propaganda were able to work at all. In the aftermath of the atom bomb, two generations of artists and writers were profoundly affected: those lucky enough to live through the conflict, and those born into the ruins.

NEW GENERATIONS

Both generations left their mark on manga in the form of apocalyptic storylines and a perpetual antagonism between self-interest and altruism, cynicism and hope. The censorship and suppression of Japanese history that followed the war provided another strong thread in modern manga. The deep vein of escapism, longing for

BELOW LEFT: Kohta Hirano's *Hellsing* first appeared in 1997

BOTTOM RIGHT: Norakuro dates all the way back from 1931. That's classic!

BELOW: Yakuji Kitazawa himself



romance and fantasy forms another thread, leading back to the wish to forget the bomb, and forward to consider change, Japanese identity and foreign influence.

Teenage superstar Osamu Tezuka (see p83) gave the post-war manga market a rocket-fuelled boost. Few children born in wartime had seen the comics that inspired Tezuka, and his thrill-packed work provided an escape from bleak everyday life. Eight-year-old Hiroshima survivor Keiji Nakazawa was collecting trash and glass to supplement his family's income when he found a copy of Tezuka's 1946 comic *Shin-Takarajima* (*New Treasure Island*). It inspired him to start writing his own manga. *Hadashi No Gen* (*Barefoot Gen*), his harrowing account of life after the bomb, was translated into English in 1976. Young Tezuka fans Mitsuteru Yokoyama, Shotaro Ishinomori and Leiji Matsumoto created seminal manga including *Tetsujin 28* (*Gigantor*), *Cyborg 009* and *Captain Harlock*.

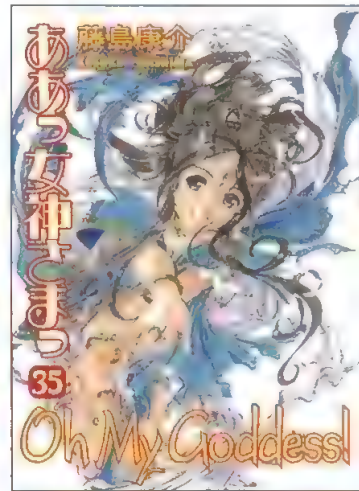
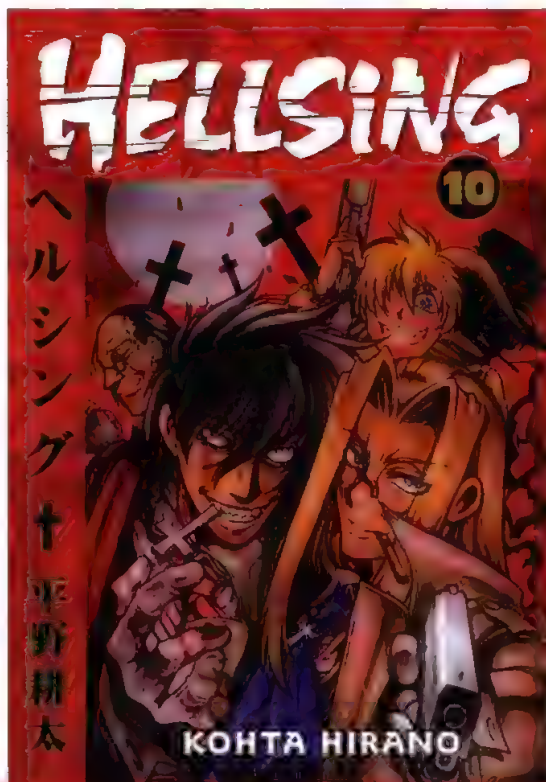
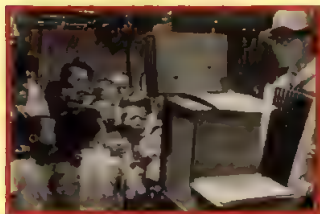
Tezuka fan Yoshihiro Tatsumi wanted to take comics in a new direction, and meeting the master encouraged him to follow his dreams. In the late 1950s, he coined the term 'gekiga' - drama pictures - to describe the comics he wanted to make. The aim was to be gritty and realistic, to move

THE UNSUNG ANCESTOR: KAMISHIBAI

Post-war Japan was starving and impoverished. The street entertainment known as kamishibai - literally 'paper theatre' - satisfied real needs. A kamishibai storyteller was a bicycle-riding salesman for cheap snacks and sweets. To attract the customers on his regular rounds, he told stories illustrated by brightly painted pictures. These were withdrawn one at a time from a wooden frame on the bike to accompany his narration.

The kamishibai man would cycle his daily route, selling snacks at each stop, then telling three or four short stories, often serials. Kamishibai was a working-class precursor of TV, and even cheaper than manga - those who couldn't afford snacks could still hang around and watch.

Many artists returning from the military scraped a living as kamishibai painters. They included Shigeru Mizuki and Goseki Kojima of *Lone Wolf & Cub* fame. Go Nagai, creator of *Mazinger Z* and *Devilman*, still recalls seeing one of Mizuki's kamishibai stories as a child: "I have a memory from my childhood of this crazy kamishibai with a martian riding an octopus robot. That story had to be one of [Mizuki's]... around 1948 or 1949. I still remember it to this day."



away from the perception of manga as trivial entertainment for children and to deal with experimental, edgy or offensive ideas. The comic rental libraries of Osaka embraced the gekiga movement, chronicled in Tatsumi's *A Drifting Life*, and the new energy attracted more artists and readers.

Today, artists such as Naoki Urusawa, creator of *Astro Boy*-inspired *Pluto*, and Katsuhiro Akira Otomo acknowledge the spell Tezuka's manga cast on them. So do many Japanese scientists and technologists, such as roboticist Minoru Asada of Osaka University and Toshiba's Takashi Yoshimi, who are both working on domestic robots inspired by Tezuka's creation.

High art has also embraced the anime and manga aesthetic. Yoshitaka

Amano has exhibited in museums and galleries around the world, and a whole generation of international artists and designers use manga influences.

A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

Machiko Hasegawa was just 14 when she sold her first work to *Shojo Club* magazine in 1934. In a society where women were expected to devote themselves entirely to the family on marriage, few women developed careers and most girls' manga were created by men, but pioneers like Hasegawa and Tezuka protégée Hideko Mizuno changed that.

In the 1970s, a group of spectacularly talented women, including Moto Hagio, Keiko Takemiya, Kyoko Arioshi and Keiko Nishi, revolutionised girls'

BELOW: Machiko Hasegawa was an early female pioneer in the field of manga.

BOTTOM: More Astro Boy! he first appeared in 1952, and got his own TV series in '63.



MANGA FORMATS

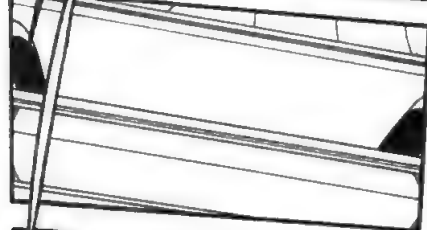
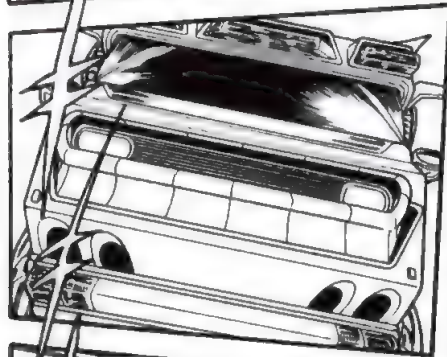
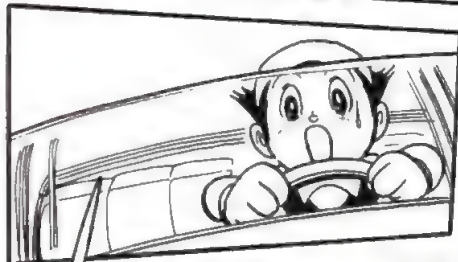
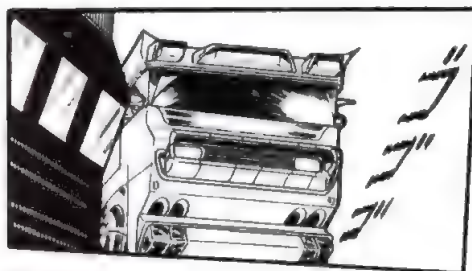
Manga have appeared in many forms. To begin with, they appeared in newspapers and magazines, imitated the single illustration or short strip format of western 'cartoons' and often had a satirical or humorous bent. Machiko Hasegawa's greatest creation, *Sazae-san*, remained a four-panel daily strip from its 1946 debut until Hasegawa's retirement. Manga are still published in this format, but most are unknown in the West.

Tezuka's first work outside newspapers was for the Osaka akahon market. Akahon, or 'red books' were luridly printed, very cheap novels and comics with huge sales in the 1940s and early 1950s. The more successful stories were eventually reprinted in better quality editions, reflecting today's market, where stories from cheap anthologies on low-grade paper may appear as better-printed tankobon single-story collections if successful.

Kashibon - books produced especially for rental libraries - spread across Japan in the 1950s, enabling readers to get their comics fix for a few pennies. Shigeru Mizuki, who made comics including *Hakuba No Kitaro* for the kashibon market, said: "That was a savage industry.... Most illustrators didn't get a shot at a second or third title - they'd get sacked after their first because it didn't sell. When you went for an interview with these companies, if you needed money to live on, you had to have finished pages with you and ready to go. You had to work your ass off - you were always hungry." The kashibon libraries faded out in the mid-'60s as Japan became more affluent, but there are still a few manga cafes with comics for customers to read with their coffee.

Kashibon also came under pressure from manga magazines. Monthly and quarterly publications existed from the early 1900s, but weekly manga 'zines got under way in 1963. The range of manga magazines in Japan is very broad, from boys' market leader *Shonen Jump* and girls' titles like *Margaret* and *Nakayoshi* to mags for older men and women like *Action DeLuxe* and *Cutie Comic*, by way of niche titles like *Kindai Mahjong Original*, *Manga Pachinker* and *Golf Comic*. There's also a strong erotic manga market, with magazines devoted to gay romance for straight women, and true gay and lesbian manga.

The new kid on the format block is digital manga. Canny Japanese publishers don't just offer new works, but exploit back catalogues, making older manga available in bite-size chunks for a few yen. The iPad opens up new options, too.



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manga. They were known as the 'Magnificent 49ers' or the 'Year 24 group' (they were born in or around 1949, or Showa era year 24). Far from being solely devoted to romance, starry eyes and flowery backgrounds, they made work based on history, science fiction or social issues. They opened the door for later artists such as Rumiko Takahashi, Fumi Yoshinaga and Ai Yazawa. Female artists evolved unique twists on existing genres, such as the 'boys love' manga that pair up gorgeous men in passionate dramas for women to enjoy.



As manga spread beyond Japan, the idea that women could make and read comics on any subject inspired young women all over the world.

SYNERGY AND SYMBIOSIS

The 1970s also ushered in an expansion of the market for animation, toys and electronic games. Throughout the '70s and into the '80s, Japan became increasingly affluent, expanding its

TOP LEFT: *Beach Paradise* by King Terry. Inventive stuff

MIDDLE: *ESPI: Jungle Emperor Leo*, another Tezuka masterpiece

markets into a world with more money to spend and a lively interest in new products. Tezuka, Nagai and others created animation and live-action TV based on their comics, which functioned as free advertising for the products of their sponsors - including many character-based goods

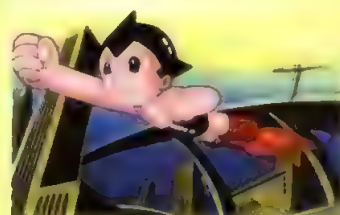
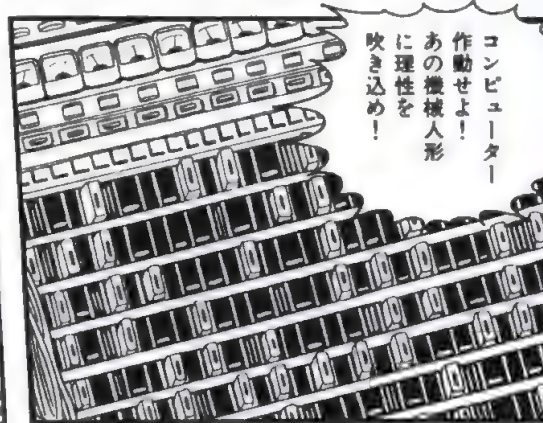
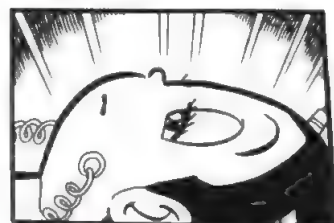
The alliance with merchandising and sponsorship was exploited by Tezuka to fund Japan's TV animation industry. His programmes had to compete with cheap American and European imports, so he offered them at prices that barely covered production costs, leveling the balance sheet with merchandising and tie-ins

When anime began to sell abroad, manga accompanied it into European and Asian markets. Most English-speaking readers, fixated on superheroes and accustomed to seeing comics purely as cheap entertainment for little boys, were simply not ready for manga, but Japanese console games became popular and the rise of the personal computer enabled them to spread still further.

THE DIGITAL AGE

Many manga are now made entirely digitally. Buichi Terasawa, former Tezuka apprentice and creator of *Cobra*, was one of the pioneers of the trend. In 1985, he spent \$10,000 on a computer and made colour illustrations of his *Black Knight Bat* for *Weekly Jump Magazine*. Hudson's 1989 release of the PC-Engine game *Legend Of The Holy Knight* excited him, and he worked with them on a PC-Engine game based on *Cobra* two years later. It was a hit in America as well as Japan, and paved the way for Hudson's later work in digital comics. Terasawa took the experience into his full-colour manga *Takeru*, created entirely on





OSAMU TEZUKA: THE GOD OF MANGA

Born to an affluent, creative middle-class family near Osaka in 1928, Tezuka grew up sharing his father's comics and accompanying his theatre-loving mother and siblings to the movies, as well as the musical extravaganzas at the local all-female Takarazuka Theatre. In 1946, aged 17, he made his professional debut with a gag strip in a local children's paper. A year later, now at medical school, he was creating book-length science fiction, fantasy and adventure comics fizzing with ideas. Working 20-hour days, recruiting editors, friends and fans to help him meet an increasingly difficult schedule, he created many of the time-saving systems still in use in manga studios.

In 1951, Tezuka created *Tetsuwan Atom* (*Astro Boy*). The boy robot starred in Japan's first animated TV series in 1963, appeared in America that same year and became a global icon. He was just one of a family of characters that Tezuka used like actors in a range of roles and media, from radio drama and live-action TV to animation, comics and advertising. Tezuka's *Princess Knight* increased the popularity of girls' manga. His works cross genres and age bands, and are so complex and diverse that they influenced almost every manga artist who followed. Tezuka died in 1989, and is still shaping the iconography of Japanese comics.



a computer and released in 1993. Now 55, he is still a multimedia and technology enthusiast.

Many artists still use brush pens on paper, but the falling price of memory and PC peripherals have encouraged other manga creators to experiment. Mitsuru Fujimoto, creator of 'boys' love' manga *Oresama To Oji*, made her professional debut in 1989. She recalls that "32MB of Mac memory cost as much as ¥100,000, and the software for drawing manga wasn't very good at all." Now, Fujimoto says, the pen tablet is digital, "but there is virtually no difference between the touch of a conventional pen. [It's] no longer a novelty item but... an essential tool for manga artists."

Artists and fans around the world increasingly share their ideas,

artwork and comics online, and collaborations between artists have led to developments such as Europe's nouvelle manga, where French and Belgian artists collaborate with their Asian counterparts to create new works. The Japanese authorities encourage interest in manga and anime as part of their drive to sell more products worldwide, and 'Cool Japan' has become one of the most identifiable brands of the 21st century.

And all this came about because 19th-century Japanese artists looked at imported comics and thought, "This is a little bit like manga - let's try out some of these Western ideas and see what happens..." **CPA**

■ Helen McCarthy is the Eisner-nominated author of *The Art of Osamu Tezuka: God Of Manga*, out now from Ilex Press.

ABOVE: Did you know that, in 2007, Astro Boy was named Japan's envoy for overseas safety? He's also appeared in biographical 'educational' mangas on subjects such as Einstein

THE MAKING OF... JUDGE MINTY

Dressing Dredd

Last issue we took you behind the scenes on the Judge Dredd fan film *Judge Minty*, but who is it that's made the movie look so true to the comics? We talk to the man behind the masks... **By Michael Molcher**

How do you combat crime on the mean streets of Mega City One and stay looking sharp? Dan Carey-George has the answers – he's behind the costumes and props on the *Judge Minty* fan film. A model maker for 15 years, he's run Custom Creations for the past decade and specialises in film and games replicas and FX. He reveals how you bring Judge Dredd to life, and how to make shoulder pads that don't slap actors in the face!

COMIC HEROES: How did you get into doing FX and replicas?

DANIEL CAREY-GEORGE: I've always been a fan of FX and while doing my Foundation in Art, I visited Lyons Models And Effects in Bristol. They showed me around and advised me on model-making courses. From then on, the die was cast. I've made some pretty weird things – trees riding motorbikes, The Clash and Pink Floyd album covers, giant clocks, robots... I recently made a full-size, working Warthog from the game *Halo* – which is only the second one in the world – for a film project called *Operation Chastity* by Peter Cooper.



DANIEL CAREY-GEORGE

ABOVE RIGHT: On set with *Judge Minty*. If only Stallone had looked like this, eh?



CH: What is it about *Dredd* that makes you such a fan?

PC-G: *Dredd* is just a brilliantly devised piece of comic book writing and design. Dredd can be so many things without ever abandoning his core value – the Law.

CH: How did you become involved with the *Judge Minty* fan film?

PC-G: I got chatting to [director] Steven Sterlachinni about a *Dredd*

helmet I made as a portfolio piece and we talked about a short film. It was all purely theoretical until I showed my 2000 AD-based work at the 'Monster Mash' exhibition, organised by Maria Cork, who does make-up and creature FX. The show was for FX people and Steve Green introduced himself to me as a 2000 AD fan. We got chatting and realised that with our combined efforts, a *Judge Dredd*-based fan film was a realistic proposal.

COSTUME BREAKDOWN

HELMET:

A Rocketeer helmet I made and reworked. Moulded in silicone rubber, cast in fibreglass. The lens is custom vac-formed to fit.

LAWGIVER:

Custom-made and cast in resin. Internally-lit selector gauge

'EAGLE' SHOULDER PAD:

Master made from layered MDF and styrene sheets. Moulded and cast in semi-rigid rubber. Mounted with a Velcro system, linked to a plastic shoulder pad bonded inside the eagle body, which was taken from rollerblade armour

BELT:

Genuine army pouches and clip belt, painted and weathered, with custom-cast eagle motifs attached to poppers.

KNEE/ELBOW PADS:

Master from vacformed neoprene stippled with latex for texture. Moulded and cast in semi-rigid rubber, backed up with neoprene.



and fixed with elastic strapping riveted to the rubber casting.

'BAR' SHOULDER PAD:

Master made from MDF and styrene sheets. Moulded and cast in semi-rigid rubber. Mounted with Velcro

BADGE:

Custom-made laser-cut shapes and names, hand finished, cast in resin.

GLOVES:

Adapted motocross gloves with extensions from a pair of 'Jedi' gauntlets. Pouches were an eBay find, made by Nokia

BUCKLE:

Custom-made laser-cut shapes, hand finished and cast in resin.

LEATHER SUIT:

Custom-made two-piece leather suit.

BOOTS:

These are adapted motocross boots with some additional moulded latex toe details



Sheffield: City of Kings. And Judges.



2000 AD art droid Greg Staples plays Dredd himself. Nice chin, Greg!

Veteran actor Edmund Dehn plays the titular Judge Minty. Comfy there, Ed?



CH: Whose interpretation of Dredd have you based the designs on?

DC-G: From the start I knew it had to be as practical as possible, but also believable. I didn't want a comic book feel, so I let the build give me the final look - using rigid materials to avoid it looking overly sculpted and decorative. I knew I had to please as many people as possible, so basing it on one artist might have alienated some fans. However, the works of Steve Dillon, Brian Bolland and Mick McMahon are often referred to.

CH: How did you deal with the costume's intrinsic impracticality?

DC-G: I knew there'd be some limitations with the shoulder eagle especially, but I found that if it's

mounted to the arm and not the shoulder, it tends to move with the arm. After the masters were made of the pads, I took silicone moulds and made rubber copies. These were then painted to look like metal. The left pad is almost rigid, but the eagle's wings flex without looking soft, so the arm gets a surprising range of movement

CH: Your designs are much more faithful than Stallone's *Dredd* movie. Where did they go wrong?

DC-G: It was too clean, too shiny, and ended up looking more like a ceremonial costume than something worn to fight crime.

CH: What was it like watching people wearing your costumes?

DC-G: It's good to see it in action. The few people who have worn it have all been reluctant to hand it back!

Head over to www.themodelmaker.co.uk for more on Custom Creations, and www.judgeminty.com for the Judge Minty fan film.



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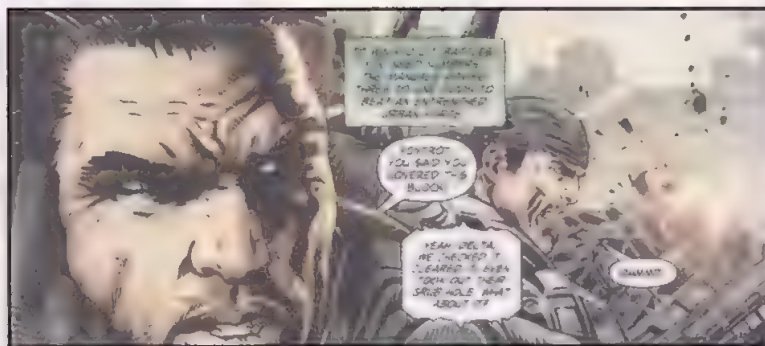
How To...

HOW TO... WRITE FOR COMICS

Behold! The second part of our invaluable guide to writing comics. By Rob Williams

So, in part one of our monster feature we asked a plethora of successful comic writers – both British and American – pertinent questions such as 'how did you get your break into the comics industry?' and 'how do you get yourself noticed by an editor?' And several prominent comic editors shared their thoughts on what they want from a new writer in order to convince them to publish their work. The answers didn't include a brown paper envelope stuffed with used notes. Shame. It would make things so much easier.

So, without further ado, here are more top tips. You want to have a career writing for comics? To be the next Alan Moore, Grant Morrison or Geoff Johns? Read on... »



COMIC HEROES

ROGUES' GALLERY

Say hello to the comic pros who emptied their brains for this feature...

1. Rob Williams

Rob Williams wrote this, plus *RoboCop*, *Indiana Jones And The Tomb Of The Gods*, *Cla\$\$war*, and loads more. Superpower: intense stare.

2. Tony Lee

Tony Lee writes the ongoing *Doctor Who* series for IDW. Superpower: magic beard.

3. Simon Spurrier

Simon (SI) Spurrier has written *Silver Surfer*, *X-Men*, *Batman* and *Judge Dredd*. Superpower: leathery hide.

4. Al Ewing

Al Ewing is a regular writer for *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd Magazine*. Superpower: secondary row of teeth.

5. David Hine

David Hine is a writer and artist. His major creator-owned work is *Strange Embrace* from Active Images and Image Comics. Superpower: smells great.

6. Antony Johnston

Antony Johnston is the creator of *Wasteland* and is currently writing *Daredevil* and *Cold City*. Superpower: constantly monochrome.

7. Kieron Gillen

Kieron Gillen is the writer of *Phonogram*, *Thor* and *SWORD*. Superpower: the sexy dancing.

8. Jeff Mariotte

Jeff Mariotte is writer of *Desperadoes*, *Garrison*,

Fade To Black, *Zombie Cop*, and many more. Superpower: deadly ventriloquism.

9. Joseph Rybandt

Joseph Rybandt works for Dynamite Entertainment. Superpower: able to manifest a tiny penguin from each fingertip.

10. Matt Smith

Matt Smith is the editor of *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd Magazine*. Superpower: types on two keyboards simultaneously.

11. Chris Ryall

Chris Ryall is the publisher and editor-in-chief of IDW Publishing. Superpower: sweats bananas.

12. Dan Abnett

Dan Abnett has written extensively for *2000 AD*, and is currently writing cosmic superhero books for Marvel. Superpower: external lungs.

13. Andy Diggie

Andy Diggie has written *Hellblazer*, *Adam Strange* and *The Losers*, among others. Superpower: piercing falsetto.

14. Joshua Ortega

Joshua Ortega is the man behind Wildstorm's *Gears Of War*. Superpower: ability to control elephants.

15. Randy Stradley

Randy Stradley is a writer and VP of Dark Horse Comics. Superpower: sees everything. And we mean everything.



Q WHAT, FOR YOU, IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF A PITCH? WHAT DO YOU PUT UP FRONT?

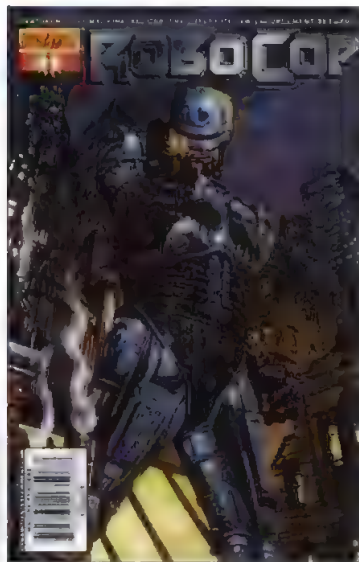
The pitch should be one side of diligently spell- and grammar-checked A4. You can hit the editor with the more detailed version once they show interest. And make sure your name and contact details are on there too! The art of the pitch is all about grabbing an editor's attention quickly...

AI Ewing (Judge Dredd, 2000 AD): I try to put a strapline in at the start to get the editor's attention – something to set the tone and boil everything down to one memorable hook. "It's the Foreign Legion in space and they're fighting for the wrong side." Beyond that, I just remember what I learned in school – the first sentence and the last sentence have to be absolute blinders.



SI Spurrier (Silver Surfer, Ghost Rider): Sounds obvious, but if you want the most important aspect of a pitch, it's this: a good story. All the rest of it – loglines, character profiles, sketches-by-your-pro-artist-mate, movie-X-meets-movie-Y-on-acid – all that gimmicky fluff – is all well and good, and if your aim really were only to 'grab attention' then that's all that matters. But you can't polish a turd, and you can't hide a dismal story behind a great pitch. Best advice for pitch writing: keep it simple, keep it short, cut out anything that doesn't need to be there, and try to inject it with a flavour of the eventual story.

Tony Lee (Doctor Who, X-Men): The best way to start a pitch is with a high concept, a soundbite that could provide a vision of your idea into a 20-second conversation. It's the Hollywood thing, to be able to pitch three or four ideas in a single minute.



TOP: Josh Ortega's *Battlestar Galactica*. That's not him in the dress (we think)

MIDDLE RIGHT: Andy Diggle contributed a great run to Vertigo's *Hellblazer*

LEFT: Rob Williams is currently writing *RoboCop*. Lucky dog



No editor is going to read a full script on spec, and to start with they need to know why they should want it. Currently I have a story called 'Dodge & Twist'. It's the characters of *Oliver Twist*, 12 years on, performing a heist. A high concept of that would be: "It's a sequel to *Oliver Twist* – *Oceans Eleven*, if written by Charles Dickens."

Andy Diggle (The Losers, Daredevil): You need a great hook right up front – a 'grabby' concept with plenty of narrative momentum. Keep it simple, keep it fast, and don't overwrite it.

Dan Abnett (The Authority, Nova): The most important part is the story (gee, Dan, fascinate me further). I mean the whole story. So many pitches are great or provocative premises, great springboards, and then the pitch doesn't include how it ends. It is not a

moment for coyness or spoiler warnings. A writer's relationship with the editor is not like his relationship with the reader. An editor needs to know how a story is going to end before he can decide whether to commission it or not. So, front and centre... the whole story summed up in a neat, brief paragraph.

David Hine (Detective Comics, X-Men): High concept is very important these days. Brian K Vaughan's *The Last Man* is the perfect example "What if you wake up one day and all the men on Earth are dead except you?" It's every guy's teen fantasy and it's also the starting point for some fascinating plot lines.

That one or two line initial concept will grab attention but then you need engaging characters and a plot with plenty of satisfying twists and reversals





and ultimately a theme. If you don't have something to say then no matter how superficially exciting the story may seem to be, it will still feel empty and unsatisfying

Antony Johnston (Daredevil, Wasteland): You need a good hook. The first thing in all my pitches is an extended blurb, like on the back of a



© Clayton Hickman

book – but longer, and with the story hook left dangling. If that's enough to make them turn the page, you're already halfway there

The next most important thing follows on from that, and it's something so many novice writers don't realise once you're past the blurb, and into the meat of the pitch, you must outline your story in full. Half an outline, ending with "but things don't go as planned" is no use to man, beast, nor editor. Nobody can judge a story without knowing how it ends

Jeff Mariotte (Wildcats, Desperadoes):

The most important aspect is a logline of some kind – the 30 or 40-second 'elevator pitch' that sums up what the project is about in as few words as possible. That can focus on an element of the plot, or a character – whatever the most unique, compelling thing in the story is. But it should be short, and to the point. You can go longer later

Joshua Ortega (Gears Of War, Battlestar Galactica): Catchy, not too long, with a good title and awesome hook. I like to throw a quote up there sometimes too, and try to keep it to a page. Editors don't have

a lot of time to read pitches, so brief and punchy is good

Kieron Gillen (Thor, Phonogram): On a cold pitch, you'd want to keep it as short as possible. On an invited pitch however you can afford to sprawl a little – though, I stress, you should only make it as long as it needs to be, and certainly not find yourself padding

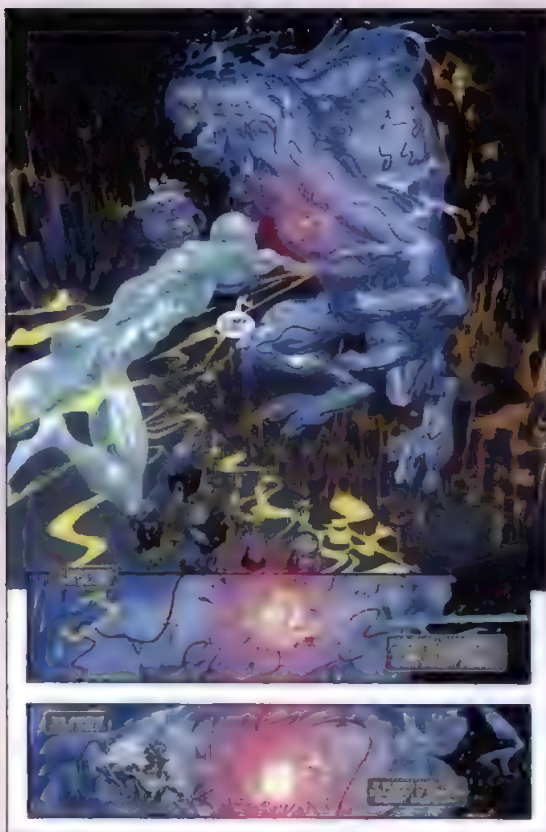
In terms of format, I quite often start with a single line to set the mood. As in, throw the title up there and something beneath it. For *Phonogram's* pitch, I put a quote from a Blur record ("Oh England, my love, you made me look like a fool", from the song 'All My Life') – which was both appropriate and a little bit sneaky, as I knew the publisher was a huge anglophile (here's a useful lesson: try to know who you're pitching at). For other pitches I've taken a couple of lines out of context of the script, which set the mood. And I start strong – the *Phonogram's* pitch's first line of "Music is magic" is it. No fluffing around with the plot there. The key thing with *Phonogram* was the idea behind it, not the plot-mechanics. What's most important about the comic? Front-load that. Sell the message



© A. F. W. & S. / Marvel
Zombie from 2000 AD's
a head. A head, we say. Yes we do.

© That man
We can't do this
we can't do this
we can't do this
we can't do this





Q WHAT NOT TO DO...

The protocols of getting comic work from editors are dizzying. It would be nice if it were as easy as the utopian ideal of 'produce good work, and you'll get noticed.' Real life is never that kind, though, so when starting out you need to push a little, but it's easy to go that bit too far. There's tragedy and truth behind these entertaining tales...

Al Ewing: I did once say something obnoxious about a big-name comics writer, and his editor-in-chief, on the internet. It was made clear to me by certain parties connected with them that that was a 'Bad Thing' and came firmly under the category of 'Would Have Repercussions'. I wouldn't say my career was damaged, exactly, but it's certainly limited my options in the short to medium term, and maybe forever depending on who you talk to. So watch out for the internet - everything you post there will come back to haunt you, so be a Kurt Busiek and be renowned for your online wisdom and grace, instead of a John Byrne.

Si Spurrier: Most horror stories revolve around the 'entitlement-wanker' phenomenon, in which someone with no particular track record and no obvious signs of genius mistakes themselves for a shit hot property, and

TOP LEFT: The Silver Surfer - a good man to have on your side when it kicks off down the pub. Probably.

TOP RIGHT: Frazer Irving's *Days Missing*. He illustrated Mr Spurrier's *Gutsville*.

assumes every editor knows it. The one that always sticks in my mind is a person who approached a US editor with the 'idea' of doing an anthology comic, in which the gimmick was that each story was written and drawn by different members of said individual's friendship circle. A 'My Amazing Pals' sort of thing. The pitch began with words to the effect of: "You'd be an idiot to miss this opportunity!" Legend has it that the editor in question has pinned said email to a board above his/her desk, to remind him/herself every day of exactly what an idiot, har har, they were.

Tony Lee: You need to learn patience in this industry. You're emailing an editor for work who already has more work in a day than he or she has hours for. So you're going to be way down the list of priorities. They're not going to reply to you within an hour, a day or even a week. If you've not heard back

in a month, then perhaps drop a quick follow up email checking if the post was received. I hear too many stories of writers emailing daily for updates to an editor who doesn't even remember them or their story.

I was told at one convention of a particular A-list editor for one of the big two (Marvel and DC) who had a teenaged man with his stunning, blonde, Playboy-esque girlfriend walk up to him at a convention and go, totally seriously, "Give me [CHARACTER] to write and you get her. All of her, for as long as you want." Unsurprisingly, he didn't get the gig.

Andy Diggie: That galaxy-spanning multi-issue mega-epic you've been planning since you were 14? Bin it. I'm afraid it's never going to happen. Instead, write lots of short, self-contained stories. Learn from your mistakes and move on to the next thing. Keep moving forward.





Dan Abnett: Threats of physical violence are generally considered to not be the best way to help a writer/editor relationship blossom.

David Hine: Don't bore editors. Don't stalk editors, either. They don't want to hear your life story and they don't want you bombarding them with emails and phone calls. Send them your material and then, if you don't hear back after a month or so, send a polite reminder by email. If you still don't hear back, forget about it. On several occasions I've been in an office when an editor is fielding a call from a hopeful creator who has called just a few too many times. These are professional guys and they're usually polite, but when the call is finished and they hang up the phone, the comments are not pretty.

Antony Johnston: It's very simple – don't be a prick. Act like a professional at all times, and remember that editors are overworked ordinary people, like everyone else. The moment you think your time is more important than theirs, you're toast.

Yes, yes, Alan Moore gets away with it. I've got news for you, sunshine: you are not Alan Moore.

Jeff Mariotte: During my years as an editor at DC/WildStorm and IDW, I feel like I've seen every horror story there is. Sadly, I'm sure I've not even come close to encountering them all.

These are a few of the mistakes I've seen: don't dare an editor to publish something, or threaten, or cajole, or bribe, or shame. An editor will respond to good work presented well. An editor will not care if your cover letter says: "Only a jackass would pass up the chance to publish this!" or "If you publish this I'll name my dog and/or first child after you!"



Kieron Gillen: If you want horror stories (and advice) it's well worth following CB Cebulski on twitter (twitter.com/CBCEBULSKI). As well as being a splendid writer and editor, he's Marvel's main talent scout for artists. He regularly tweets advice, which is artist-centric, but the general rules should be taken – and when he picks someone up for a *faux pas*, be sure not to make the same one yourself.

Joshua Ortega: I'd say so many of the success stories I've heard about in entertainment involve breaking the rules, that maybe it's best to just forget a lot of the conventions and make your own way. Of course, don't be rude to an editor, or don't hand over your pitch while jerking off, but outside of totally whacked-out behaviour, be creative. Creativity is what writing is all about. Be creative.

ABOVE LEFT: Gutsville. It's set in the belly of a whale (don't worry: it's not a true story)

ABOVE: *VS: Damnation Station* by the ubiquitous – and bearded – Al Ewing





Q DIALOGUE! WITHOUT TALKING WE'D BE NOWHERE.

No more than 28 words in a voice bubble. Alan Moore once said that. Maybe. Of course, all rules are there to be broken. How do you make your characters speak convincingly?

Al Ewing: Be prepared to murder your children. You might be in love with that Wildean quip about hospital food, but if it doesn't flow and sticks out like a sore thumb in the scene, out it goes. Do a few passes to chop out extraneous wordage - shorter is usually better. Keep the dialogue flowing. Also, give each character a distinctive speech pattern. It doesn't have to be Claremontian 'Ah am from the South', 'Unglaublich, mein herr!' stuff - just small, subtle things that stop everybody sounding like you. There's a lot of writers who don't bother doing this, so all their characters sound exactly the same.

Tony Lee: Most people will tell you to read it aloud, but I say you should letter a page of your script, at least once. Only then do you learn the 'less is more' rule. You learn that although you can have up to 30 words in a panel, some panels are too small, or you've asked for too much to be in that panel. Learn to link boxes to make the text flow easier.

Andy Diggle: Say it out loud.

Dan Abnett: No more than ten words per balloon, and no more than two balloons per panel, and no more than six panels per page. You will break all of these rules, all of the time, but they are really useful default yardsticks.

ABOVE LEFT: Gutsville again. It gets everywhere, doesn't it? It's lucky that we love it like Kinder Eggs.

ABOVE: Gears Of War by the man Ortega. It sells a lot of copies.



David Hine: Comic book dialogue has to be succinct. You only have about 130-150 words to the page at most, even for a dialogue-heavy scene, so make every word count. You have about ten per cent of the dialogue that a TV show or movie has to tell a story. Ask a writer who has moved from TV to writing comics. It drives them crazy.

Antony Johnston: Keep it short. And make sure it sounds natural.

Sometimes you have to say to hell with grammar, you know.

Jeff Mariotte: Short. Shorter than any of the other answers I've given. Pithy is good. Become a poet. Pare words that don't matter.

Joshua Ortega: Keep at it, work hard, cast a lot of lines to catch a fish. And make sure to have a very wide selection of lures.



THE EDITORS SPEAK

What, exactly, are editors looking for – aside from desperate Mark Chapman-style writers to not be standing vigil in the bushes outside their apartment building at 4.12am? These are the people who may well hire you in the future... it bodes well to heed their words.

Q If you had one piece of advice for people who want to write for you, what would it be?

Randy Stradley, Dark Horse Comics: I once joked that I was surprised no one had figured out the efficacy of attaching a \$20 bill to their proposals. But then somebody did, and he refused to take it back. He didn't get hired, but I appreciated that he could see a joke through to the end. Seriously, I would suggest you work to make what you're writing an entertaining read. Do your best to keep me engaged so that I will actually read your pitch.

Matt Smith, The Mighty Tharg!
2000 AD: Read a lot, and not just science fiction and not just comics. The more you see how writers in every medium work, the better understanding you'll have for constructing stories, developing characters, and writing dialogue.

Ben Abernathy, Wildstorm: The best first impression you can make is to just introduce yourself and be polite, professional and direct. Rather than really trying to pitch something on the spot, if you get the ear of an editor, I'd ask for advice on breaking in and how to approach the business and if the opportunity presents itself, give an idea of the type of story you'd like to tell... but again, being too pushy will probably just turn them off you.

I look for the author's ability to clearly explain the core concept in a minimal number of words. That tells me they have a firm grasp of the story and the structure of what they're trying to sell. Keep it lean and mean.

Be patient and understand the process and limitations. Nothing in life comes easy and hard work is the key to success.

Joseph Rybant, Dynamite Entertainment: Make yourself known in some form or fashion. Good self-promoters can be a tremendous asset to a publisher our size. And never leave me waiting for a script or other materials – be ahead of the curve in that sense.

Chris Ryall, IDW Publishing: I'd say, know who you're pitching to, and know the state of the marketplace. When I get a pitch for an 18-issue superhero series and it comes with nothing but a cover letter and then 18 finished scripts, well, that misses on many levels. Also, if a publisher doesn't do superhero comics, don't pitch them superhero books. And sending finished scripts at the start is also not going to get you anywhere.

Through it all, know that it's a small industry and that publishers do book up a year or more out, so the actual available slots can be very limited. That means that you can't let a non-response or a pass derail you, or get you down too much. If it's really something you want to do, keep pushing for it, even if that means self-publishing at the start. But don't ever let an editor discourage you to a point where you consider just giving up.

Q What shouldn't people do if they want to get work from you? Any convention/pitch horror stories?

Randy Stradley: Here's my favourite convention story, from

Comic-Con International, San Diego: I had just returned to the Dark Horse booth after a four-hour stint reviewing portfolios when an artist approached me with the story that he had arrived too late to get in the review line, so could I please take a look at his work now. I begged off, explaining that I was done looking at portfolios for the day, and that if I opened his portfolio in the booth a line of other hopefuls would instantly form behind him. Upon hearing this, he invited me to go fuck myself, and proceeded to shout to all within earshot that when he was a big star he would never work for Dark Horse. I assured him that was indeed the case. Antagonising the person who is in a position to hire you is not the way to land a job. Not all editors hold grudges, but some of us do.

Matt Smith: If you're going to get huffy because I think your work might not be there yet, you're in the wrong business. You need to approach submitting work with a professional mindset, and, having read the guidelines, know the title you're pitching to. Don't send me umpteen pin-ups of Wolverine. Don't send me your idea for a 20-part Dredd epic. I'm looking for people who want to be professional writers and artists, not those who just want to have a story published in their favourite comic.

We've got a folder in the office where we keep some of the more 'interesting' material we've been sent in the post, including a guy who keeps sending in type-written letters detailing his time-travelling Nazi series idea, under the guise that they are coming from a 14-year-old girl...

Ben Abernathy: The main one would be don't verbally pitch an idea at really obviously awkward moments. Case in point: I was at my eye doctor a few months ago and I had to get my eyes dilated for the exam. As I'm sitting there, letting the eye drops take effect, the doctor, upon hearing that I worked for a comic book company owned by Warner Bros, decides to verbally pitch me an idea... for a gag book! It was painful in more ways than one.

Joseph Rybant: We see a lot of material and most of it's totally unusable for what we do for a variety of reasons. If you're looking for work, and you know what we do, pitch us something that fits our comics, and do it quickly and professionally. You'll rise to the top of the pile pretty quick that way.

Chris Ryall: On the off-chance that you can get an editor to even read your pitch, you definitely don't want them seeing that you don't actually know how to spell or don't know proper grammar. Even then, I'm willing to cut someone slack if an idea is good, but typos do limit the chances of someone reading a pitch all the way through.

I don't have any real convention horror stories, other than being pitched when it's after hours and I have a Guinness waiting in my hand. Cons tend to remove barriers for people to approach editors, which is fine and great during the show, but afterwards, assume that I'm all talked out and much more interested in seeing the bottom of my glass than I am hearing about your pitch. I've had a few instances of being pitched ideas after 12am.

ONE FINAL TIP

Here we are, at the end, with some final thoughts for you, dear reader...

Rob Williams: Remember that the good, low maintenance freelancer will always be an attractive hire. Produce well thought out/structured work, always hit deadlines, make sure everything is spell-checked, grammar-checked and professionally formatted when you present it and don't bombard the editor with endless emails and questions. Editors are busy. If you can make their life easier, they'll want to hire you again. Good luck...

Al Ewing: Lose the attitude. By 'attitude' I don't mean confidence in yourself and your work, I mean the idea that you are somehow special. You're not special. Nobody is special. Thinking you're special just makes you suck. It makes you write self-aggrandising Tweets about how your ideas come with such frequency that they're very much like torture. It makes you start a 60-page OGN about elves that you'll never finish because you're too special to sit down and write a one-page twist ending story that might actually see print. You're not special.

Si Spurrier: Surgically remove any sense of entitlement that might be lurking in your soul. You know you're

a great writer, but nobody else does. You've got to prove it, not just expect everyone to see it themselves.

The second you stop believing you're somehow owed a career, owed plaudits, owed big breaks, owed praise... Is the second you start paying a bit of fucking attention to the advice – general, specific, critical and complimentary – of the editors and professionals who've done it before. The second you stop thinking you're a twinkly snowflake destined to glitter in the sun for the world to admire is the second you start putting some bloody work into earning the right to be noticed. And, as luck would have it, by discovering humility and self-doubt, your writing will automatically get a billion times better. Win-win.

Tony Lee: Branding and networking. You're a freelance writer and you're in a big pond full of other freelance writers. And therefore you'll be up against these guys and gals every time you pitch an idea. Sometimes an idea that you think isn't quite as good as yours will get through ahead of you and you'll scratch your head, but if this happens, it's most likely because the editor trusts this writer. Sure, your



ABOVE: Antony Johnston's *Wasteland*. We ran a page of script from this in the last issue, you may recall.

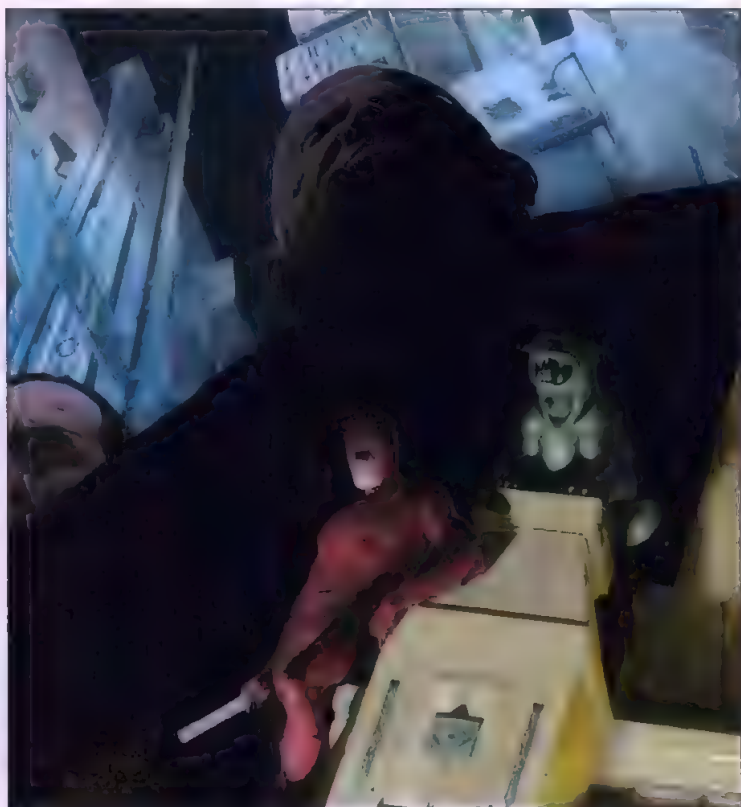
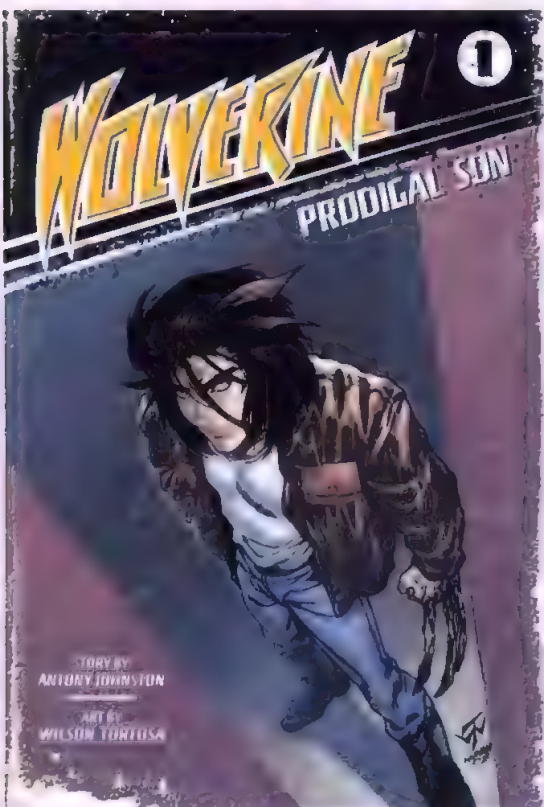
BELOW: Tony Lee's *Doctor Who*, from IDW. A nice gig, no? Yes

story might be marginally better, but the editor is there to get that book out on time and under budget. And if he or she sacrifices a tiny amount of quality in return for a writer who has a guaranteed track record of deadlines or even who has a guaranteed fan base, they'd be stupid not to do it as it makes their job easier.

So you could be the best writer in the world – and many of you reading this probably already believe that – but if nobody knows you, you're stuck in with the crowd. You have to make a connection. Branding can do that. Nobody knew me. I had to make sure I was everywhere, that people read me. I wrote long blogs. I did crazy things at conventions. I was outspoken and kicked off against people on forums. Looking back, even I think I was sometimes a little too arrogant, but it did the job. I was noticed. My name was known, even if my work wasn't.

The next stage was to distance myself from that arrogant dick while building on the brand. I always attend conventions in shirt, tie and waistcoat. I write all day in t-shirt and jeans, but I always feel I should make an effort when out at an industry event. And as people learned my name, they started to link the guy who had a particular look with the guy who they'd read on the internet. I started to find that editors I'd never spoken to chatted to me as if we were old colleagues because they believed that we had





met, because they'd bought into the brand from the internet. This gives you the connection you require.

Is it cynical? Of course. But I'm a professional writer. And these are the tools I use to gain my employment.

Dan Abnett: Don't even try writing comics unless you read them too. Practically speaking, a decent screenplay template script in formatting software like Final Draft can be easily adjusted to write comic scripts. That can be very labour saving.

David Hine: You have to love it. It takes a long time with little or no money to make a living in this profession. So imagine the next two, or even five, years, slogging away at a keyboard for hours every day with no money coming in. If you can't face it, give up now.

Anthony Johnston: Write what you're passionate about, and never give up. If you try to write what you think editors want, you'll fail, because the market moves so quickly. And unless you're writing what you truly want to write, you'll lose heart and give up when things start to go wrong (because it's a universal certainty that things will go wrong). Only tenacity and self-belief can see you through those times. Nobody else cares whether you write or not; it's all up to you.

Actually, I have more. Read lots, including plenty of stuff that isn't

ABOVE LEFT: Another slice of prime Johnston. Does he look like Wolverine in real life? No

ABOVE RIGHT: Several of our featured writers have had a crack at Daredevil. It must be the body-hugging lycra

comics. Get out there and do things to widen your experience. Your writing will be all the better for it.

Jeff Mariotte: Do good work. I don't mean writing a creative, compelling, fascinating story that no one has ever heard before, because that should go without saying. I'm talking about presenting it in a professional manner. Your pitch or your script should be neat and orderly, with the words spelled right, and the grammar correct.

When I was an editor, if I had my choice between two great concepts, but one of them looked as if it had been written by a pro who would make my life easy, and the other written by a gorilla with a word processor, there's no question which one I'd have taken. Okay, maybe the gorilla, for the novelty.

Kieron Gillen: Well, "whatever works, works" is a good general rule for the bastard medium that is comics. But in terms of actually getting work, my main piece of advice is just to bloody well make some comics. Don't sit there waiting for you to be given permission by the industry. Get involved in the small press or web comics or something. Getting a short comic drawn – even if you have to do it yourself – teaches you far more about the form than a half-dozen undrawn scripts in a drawer. Getting work out there leads to meeting artists, and – if your stuff is any good – offers

of collaborations. Doing work increases your reputation – which actually helps when you get around to speaking to editors in the industry, because it's entirely possible they may be aware of you. Don't worry about pitching that much. Worry about being good. Because when you're good enough, pitching sorts itself out.

Joshua Ortega: Keep in mind that an overnight success story only takes ten years. Don't give up, writing tends to weed out the weak, or at the very least, it tends to weed out those who aren't passionate about the craft.

Andy Diggle: Everyone always asks how to break into the industry, but they never ask how to become a better writer. That's the answer – you break in by getting good at it.

Read books on the art and craft of visual storytelling (I read lots of books on screenwriting). Take creative writing classes. Memorise every page of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. And most importantly, read lots of professional comic scripts. You can find these online at places like the Comic Book Script Archive.

If you want to write comics, just do it. You don't need anyone else's permission. The more you write, the better you'll get, and the more chance you'll have of being hired. Editors hire people with a proven body of work – so what are you waiting for? 



HOW ~~NOT~~ TO WRITE COMICS

Vagabond sci-fi weasel Guy Haley reveals how not to do it...



Guy Haley

Primarily, I'm a journalist. Six crazy years on *SFX*, working my way up from deskless tea boy to deputy editor, set me going. Three years editing Games Workshop's gaming magazine *White Dwarf* earned me the enmity of a sizeable minority of wargamers and made me grow up. Three years editing *Death Ray*, the doomed pretender to *SFX*'s crown, saw me unemployed. I'm still at it, at home on the landing. Don't worry, I have enough to eat.

I got into journalism to help me get into fiction, because I

love SF books, but also because writing them sounded like a real doss, if I'm entirely honest. I had a plan. I'd approach the behemoths of the publishing world from upwind, from the safety of the media. I'd interview all the authors and publishers I could and learn their secrets, then I would pounce like a word-tiger, grrrr! Let me tell you: that was lazy, and lazy does not work.

But once, just once, I managed to get a comic published – a white-capped peak of literary success in a flat sea of journalistic effort: *N-Jin*, from the stables of Com.x, for a while the great white hope of British comics. I went to interview founders Eddie Deighton, Russell Uttley and Neil Googe back in summer 2000. Although comics weren't my main target, this meeting surely exemplified my plan, so I got my beclawed pouncing shoes on, and on a baking hot day at a pavement bar I, um, pounced.

As you will doubtless never have read *N-Jin*, here's the short version: Richard 'Rick' Baldwin is a world-weary space traveller made nigh-on immortal by nanotechnology. Humanity's glory days are long past, and Rick wanders a regressive galaxy with a motley bunch that includes a cybernetic gorilla and an alien that communicates by farting. It isn't high art.

Originally entitled *Curse Of The Nanomen*, (Com.x wisely changed that), it was full of terrible writing sins. Firstly, it had a real case of the 'poor me's. Rick was an angry, misanthropic, frequently drunken Yorkshireman,

and so am I. The plot was... lacking, and for something that was supposed to be funny, well, it could have been funnier.

What it did have was some wit and a jot of potential. Com.x was keen, which was lucky because my first pitch was an unreadably huge document detailing an entire universe. (I was to make this mistake time and again in ensuing years).

Next, the script. I'm the kind of fan who prefers the finished product to knowing what the man behind the curtain is up to, so I had no idea whatsoever how to write a script. Rather than research it properly, I did a minimal amount of reading and dove in. An overly crammed panel layout was the result. Com.x had very excitedly told me Ian Gibson was interested in the project.

I remained self-assured of eventual four-colour success, pitching to *2000 AD* and the *Warhammer* comic until I wasn't so eager any more. My pitches were endlessly returned, and *N-Jin* was endlessly delayed. My ardour flagged, and eventual promising leads – including an indie comic – went unpursued.

Finally, in May 2003, *N-Jin* came out to reviews that asserted I was 'obviously copying' *Red Dwarf* and *Hitchhiker's*. Others were kinder, but it stung. As a reviewer myself, I gained a bit of an insight there... Still, wow! I was suitably chuffed.

Issue zero of *N-Jin* was to be it. Shortly after, Com.x entered a prolonged hiatus. A phone call from Eddie in 2004 told me someone was interested in turning *N-Jin* into a cartoon.

"I would pounce like a word tiger, grrrr! Let me tell you. That was lazy, and lazy does not work"

Once he got the script, he wasn't, describing it as "impossible". I got the impression he was a bit cross.

Com.x stuck by my idea, but progress was slow. Plans changed and changed again. Months turned to a year, then two. Com.x's self-avowed task of revolutionising Brit comics was proving hard; its enthusiasm ran into a hard wall of reality. Its releases slowed as it concentrated on its flourishing design business. As a final insult, it was burgled and its computers were stolen. That didn't help much, either.

Nothing happened. Then, in 2009, he got in touch again and told me that Com.x was cautiously on the move; this time, the thinking is 'slow and steady wins the race'. I wish them all the best, they'll get there in the end.

Reading *N-Jin* raises a few smiles, and Daniel Boulwood's artwork is brilliant. I'd love to carry it on, with my meta-arc suitably revised, but if I never do, I'm proud it's out there. At the very least, I did it – and I learned not to be a lazy little blighter in the process. 

LEFT:
Art on the comic was by Daniel Boulwood, who gamers might know from the distinctive promo art of shoot-'em-up *Timesplitters 2*



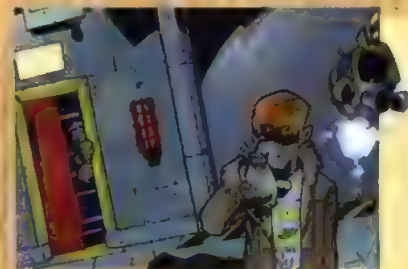
BELOW: Rick wasn't as lovable as our Guy, but he probably smelt a bit better



ABOVE: The final caption here reads, "Bollocks! Too damn yeasty 'Fact!"



ABOVE: No comic tale of the future is complete without a giant, intelligent gorilla



ABOVE: Rick is accompanied here by 97X, the ship's computer avatar

WISDOM from the FUTURE!

What Rick Baldwin
taught me...

Get contacts

Sadly, it **does** matter who you know. Were this not the case, my half-baked attempts would never have got anywhere, nor would I have received the help I needed in order to refine my ideas. Fortunately, anyone can network at conventions.

It's not easy

Fiction is soul-destroying to get into, incredibly difficult to actually do and poorly paid. Never forget this.

Don't be lazy

If you're going to do a pitch, you have to apply yourself as if you are already being paid for it. Dashing something off won't work.

Have passion

American comics were never my primary interest. I enjoy them, but if you want a comics nut, you should speak to my brother. I should have approached the genre with less opportunism and more forethought.

Be determined

After much effort, I had some interest from 2000 AD, but by the time I got to that stage in their lengthy commissioning process I had lost interest. Stupid.

Editors are people too

I pitched some stories to GW's Black Library. One was from a goblin's point of view. It was slightly comedic. "We don't do comedy, Greenskin POV stories," they said. Bare months later saw the publication of humorous Ork aeronaut tale *Catch The Squidgeon*. Different editor, y'see.

Detail

By all means, write an enormous story bible, but only whip it out when your publishers ask searching questions. At that stage, it reassures that your story has a solid foundation. Early on, too much detail is swamping.

Research

Learning how to write a comic script would have helped, while finding out Gibson's preferred format could have kept him on board.

Luck

I've had good and bad, and you have to see both for what they are. Don't take the former for granted, or lament the latter



ABOVE: That's Harris, a 'nesh bastard'. It makes more sense if you're from Yorkshire

RIGHT: The enhanced gorilla's called, snappily DG 1-7-38B

BELOW: Baldwin's first mission was to create the most potent beer in all existence



ABOVE: the ape's nanetically enhanced! Doesn't stop him dreaming of bananas

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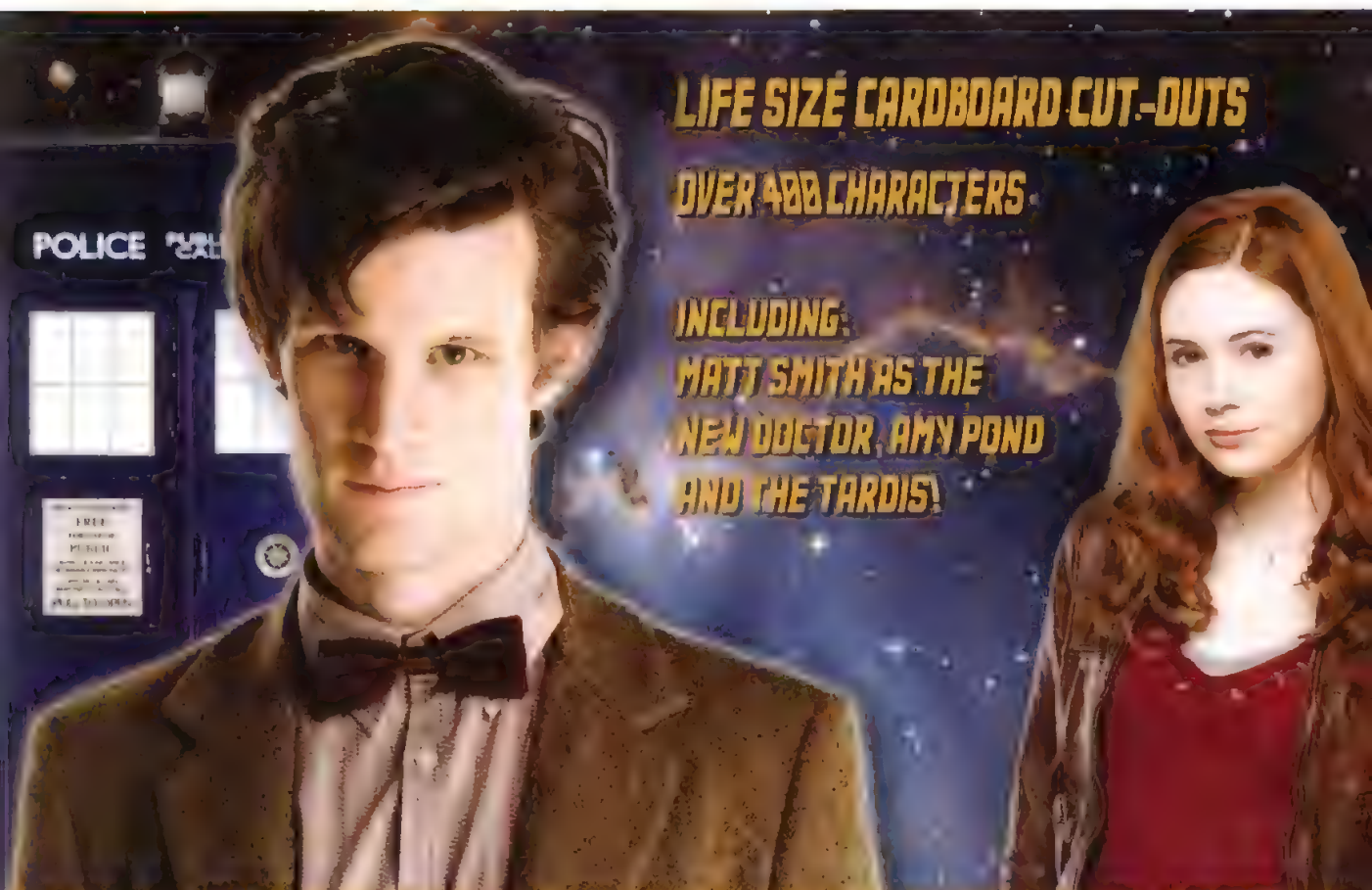


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RETROSPECTIVE

HERE COMES TOMORROW

In 2001, Marvel was seeking daring creators for some of its oldest properties – and nowhere was this more obvious than when Grant Morrison was hired to write *New X-Men*. By James Hunt

At the time, the X-Men had fallen into a rut. From 1975 to 1991, writer Chris Claremont had masterminded *Uncanny X-Men*, crafting it into Marvel's biggest property – but after his departure, the series gradually lost its shine. Once vital and fresh, the X-Men became creatively fatigued and criticised for rehashing the same tired plots and characters. Readers were forced to ask: Is there nothing new that can be done with the X-Men?

—EFT: Frank Quitely provided some dazzling art, although he couldn't contribute to every issue.



And strangely, although Morrison's run was praised for its inventiveness, there's a case to be made that it actually proved exactly what the series' detractors were saying: nothing new can be done with the X-Men. Taken as a whole, *New X-Men* can be interpreted as a 'greatest hits' compilation of X-Men stories.

For example, the major events of Morrison's run are strangely familiar: the death and return of Magneto; the restoration of Xavier's ability to walk; the return of the Phoenix; »

I DON'T
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BREAK THIS TO
YOU, BUT YOUR
DATING DAYS MAY
BE OVER, MY
FRIEND.



The Truth Behind New X-Men

What's it all about, Grant?

When Grant Morrison took over X-Men, he asked that the series be recast *New X-Men*, personally to reflect the incoming creative ethos. As part of this process, the X-Men logo was replaced by an ambigram – a stylised phrase which reads the same either way up.

So far, so gimmicky. But is there more to it? Grant Morrison is

perhaps one of the comic industry's most prominent practitioners of magic – and in a talk he gave at Disinfocon 2000, he described the use of 'sigils' in magic. Sigils, as described by Morrison, are pictures created from words which can be used to 'hack' the operating system of reality. Sound like any logos you've seen recently?

In a nutshell, then, with the widespread critical acclaim and enduring popularity of *New X-Men* is down to the genuine use of magic? We may never know for sure – but either way, the originality of Morrison's style and the top-class artists he worked with on *New X-Men* probably didn't hurt the comic's chances either.





Xorn! Not what he appeared to be. Nice mask, mind.

Morrison and Gaillet gave Beast his now-standard teleform.

Who'd have thought cabs would figure largely in X-Men eh? (Note they didn't.)



a pitched battle in a dystopian future. These stories have been done again and again with the X-Men – first by Claremont, and then by his imitators. Was it perhaps Morrison's intention to simply take the same tropes for another spin?

LOOKING FORWARD

Maybe – but at the same time, there was more to it. Morrison's run was a so about reinventing the X-Men, influenced by his own countercultural leanings. Morrison jettisoned the X-Men's previously unshakeable reliance on continuity, positioning

the book as something more science fiction than superheroics.

Crucially, he had mutants turn mainstream, portraying them as an emergent sub-culture inspiring fashion and celebrity. For the first time, the metaphor of mutants as a minority was used to illustrate something other than simple prejudice – it was now something more analogous to the queer movement or punk. Something that made being different not just acceptable, but actively cool.

As well as masterminding a symbolic shift in the status of mutants, Morrison also succeeded in introducing several

New X-Men At a Glance

Running in *X-Men* (vol. 2) #114–#154 and the *New X-Men* (Annual 2001), Grant Morrison's run can be loosely divided into nine story arcs.

U-Men Introduction (#114–#116 + Annual 2001)

The X-Men fight a new breed of Sentinels controlled by Cassandra Nova, Xavier's sociopathic twin sister. Xorn is introduced when Cyclops and Emma travel to China to investigate mutant deaths.

U-Men Take Over (#117–#121)

The X-Men find themselves under attack from John Sublime and his U-Men – a pseudo-militia who harvest mutant organs to gain their powers. When they attack the school, only Jean and her students can fend them off.

Imperial (#122–#126)

The Imperial Guard arrives on Earth to destroy the X-Men after Cassandra Nova convinces them that they are a threat to the Shi'ar. Meanwhile, Beast discovers a nano-sentinel infestation, and Xorn joins the team.

New Worlds (#127–#133)

A series of shorter stories examines mutants around the globe, from Genosha to Mumbai, while elsewhere the mutant-staffed aid organisation X-Corp gets caught in the crossfire between Fantomex and the Weapon Plus program.

Riot at Xavier's (#134–138)

When mutant fashion designer Jumbo Carnation is murdered, with humans blamed, student Quentin Quire incites a riot at the school while under the influence of the power-enhancing drug Kick.

Murder at the Mansion (#139–141)

When Cyclops' psychic affair with Emma Frost comes to light, she is murdered, her diamond form shattered. Bishop and Sage arrive at the mansion to find the culprit, while Beast and Jean attempt to reconstruct Emma and discover the killer's true identity.

Assault on Weapon Plus (#142–#145)

Wolverine, Cyclops and Fantomex infiltrate The World, a development facility for the Weapon Plus program, hoping to find details about Logan's past.

Planet X (#146–#150)

Xorn unmasks himself as Magneto, turning his 'special class' against the X-Men. High on Kick, Magneto takes over New York, planning to start a new, mutant-oriented society. The X-Men defeat him – but not without casualties.

Here Comes Tomorrow (#151–#154)

150 years after the events of Planet X, the X-Men of the future must deal with the reawakening of the Phoenix under the control of Sublime.

What does it all mean?

Morrison's *New X-Men* runs to almost a thousand pages, with each chapter contributing to a wider arc. Although all the information is in the comics, the full plot is never openly explained, and many readers were confused by the conclusion – so in case you were one of them, *Comic Heroes* presents here the full plot of *New X-Men*:

The antagonist of the story is Sublime, a sentient bacteria colony that considers itself the dominant species on Earth. First introduced in its human form, John Sublime, many of the events of *New X-Men* can actually be traced back to its attempts to wipe out mutant species, which is broadly immune to its control – founding the U-Men was one such attempt, as was the Weapon Plus super-sentinel program.

Eventually, Sublime discovers he can influence mutants when delivered in high concentrations, such as in the drug Kick. By manipulating Kick's users, Sublime engineers the death of Jean Grey, intending to reawaken the Phoenix under his control and use her powers to alter reality. Sublime's ultimate goal is to end all evolution, eliminating any further threats to his dominance. Although he almost succeeds, the X-Men of the future manage to free Jean and she uses her Phoenix powers to destroy Sublime, altering the past to prevent his plans from ever coming to fruition.

Top Five New X-Men

As well as some of our favourites, David Fierman's introduction of new mutants has been a key part of the New X-Men era.

Wolverine

Created by James Low, Wolverine was a key character in the New X-Men era. He was a mutant who had been in a coma for decades, and was the first mutant to be shown with his claws. He was a key character in the New X-Men era, and was the first mutant to be shown with his claws.



Beak

Inspired by the second generation of X-Men, all of whom originated from outside the US, Morrison introduced Sooraya Qadir, an Afghani girl with the ability to turn into living sand. The character would play a significant role in exposing Xorn as Magneto and later join the Young X-Men.



Angel

Kicked out of home when her powers manifested, Angel Salvadore's mutation made her part-fly, with large wings on her back and the ability to vomit acid. After enrolling at Xavier's, she became romantically involved with Beak and fell pregnant, laying eggs which came to term in only five days.



Beak

Barnell Bohusk's mutation gave him the physical characteristics of a bird, though unlike fellow X-Man Archangel, his wings were near-useless. Initially pessimistic about his worth, Beak would prove instrumental in the fight against Magneto and his grandson, Tito Jr, was an X-Man in the future of 'Here Comes Tomorrow'.



The Stepford Cuckoos

Originally a group of identical quintuplets (although since New X-Men finished two of the sisters have died) the Cuckoos share a powerful telepathic mind. The proteges of Emma Frost, they share her supercilious attitude. Even today, they are often seen acting as telepathic co-ordinators for the X-Men. Their name is a mash-up of horror novel titles *The Stepford Wives* by Ira Levin and *The Midwich Cuckoos* by John Wyndham. Fact!



"FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE METAPHOR OF MUTANTS AS A MINORITY WAS USED TO ILLUSTRATE SOMETHING OTHER THAN SIMPLE PREJUDICE"



THE SECRET HISTORY OF XORN

When Xorn was revealed to be Magneto in disguise, reader reactions were split. Some loved the twist, some were baffled, and others hated it – but it's clear that it had been planned since the character's first appearance.

Xorn's mutant ability was that he had a star for a brain, which was kept in check by the helmet he wore. Consistent with his mutation, telepaths are unable to read his mind – of course since Magneto intends to infiltrate a team housing three of the world's most powerful telepaths, psychic protection was crucial to maintain the facade, and

the man himself has repeatedly displayed the ability to block psi-powers. His telepathy-blocking helmet technology actually turns up as a prop during 'Riot at Xavier's'.

Furthermore, although Xorn claims to be a healer, the only time he genuinely 'heals' anyone is when he destroys a nano-sentient infestation something Magneto could easily have done. On at least one occasion, he flatly refuses a request for him to use his powers, instead allowing Quentin Quire to die by claiming that he is 'transcending' his physical form.

At other points, Xorn displays behaviour that indicates his true nature. In *New X-Men* #125, he attacks G-Type with energy waves emitted from his hands, inconsistent with Xorn's powers but not Magneto's. Although a self-proclaimed pacifist, in *New X-Men* #136 he murders a group of attacking X-Men in self-defence – something Magneto would have no problem doing.

Further evidence of Magneto's subversion of the X-Men can be seen during 'Murder at the Mansion'. After it's deduced that Esme is working for an adult master, a car with no driver

collects her. A driverless car is a feat simply accomplished by a man with control over all things metal. Magneto's involvement is confirmed in 'Planet X' when Esme returns as part of Magneto's Brotherhood.

Throughout his appearances, there is no point where Xorn does anything that could not be explained as part of Magneto's deception, either through creative use of his powers or by technological means. The mechanics are often left open to interpretation – but it wouldn't be a Grant Morrison story if every last detail was spelled out.



changes in the X-Men universe that persist to this day: the destruction of Genosha; Emma Frost's relationship with Cyclops; Beast's new feline form – all of these things originated in his run and have stuck since. Indeed, Morrison's influence was so powerful that when he killed Jean Grey, she actually stayed dead!

LASTING IMPACT

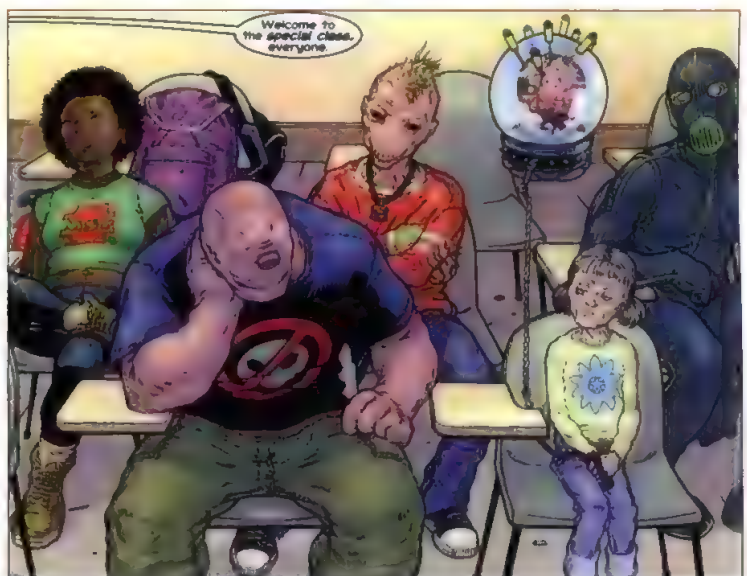
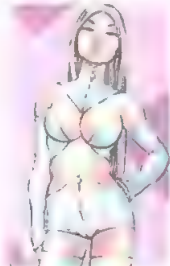
Morrison's creative tenure would last only three years, truncated by his decision to move to DC, but its impact can still be seen. Crammed with new ideas, new characters and layered storytelling, Grant Morrison's *New X-Men* has remained a fan-favourite and bestseller ever since its creation. And whether you're an old or new fan, the hidden secrets, messages and references remain as mind-blowing, and yet as easy to miss, as anything you'd expect from Morrison.

TOP LEFT The *New X-Men Annual* was presented in 'widescreen' format

LEFT Francophile newcomer Fantomex must have had a devil of a time cleaning that costume

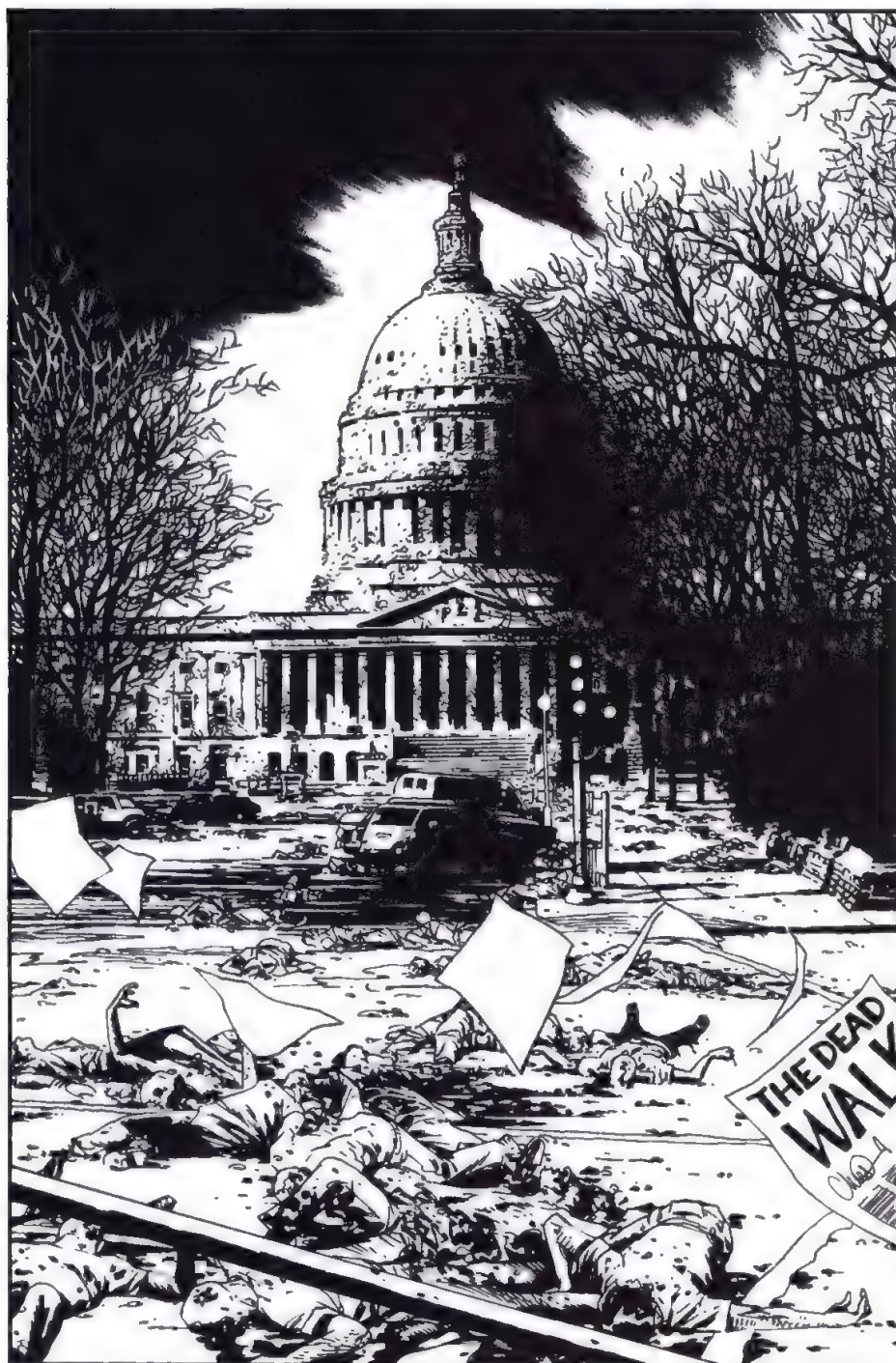
RIGHT The new Angel Beak, and a few other freaky students

BELOW This cover drew a lot of attention for a couple of reasons. We can't think why.



SURVIVING THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

Stephen Jewell meets British artist Charlie Adlard, as his horror series heads for the small screen.



With books like *Crossed* and *I, Zombie* hitting the shelves, zombies are currently vying with vampires as comic book fans' favourite members of the undead. But long before those newcomers loped into view, Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard's *The Walking Dead* had slowly been garnering a loyal following. The long-running black and white Image monthly centres around the disparate survivors of a devastating apocalyptic event rather than the shambling flesh-eaters themselves – indeed, Adlard recently drew four issues without a single reanimated corpse in sight.

"I've gone on record as saying that it's not really a zombie book at all," he says. "The zombies are just the background. It's really about a bunch of desperate people trying to cope with an extreme situation; it just happens to be a zombie situation. That's why the book has lasted so long, because everyone enjoys the characters and how they cope. The majority of readers keep coming back for that rather than buckets of gore, which we occasionally give them. But I like to think that it's all serving rather than directing the plot."

Adlard cut his teeth on the *Judge Dredd Magazine* before moving onto American titles like *The X-Files* and Wildstorm's *The Establishment*. "The ones that have stood out for me have been those where I was a creator and not just work-for-hire," he recalls. "I have fond memories of doing *Mars Attacks* with Keith Giffen and two issues of *Superman* with Joe Casey but generally the work I've done for Marvel or DC can't hold a candle to stuff you've created from scratch like *Codeflesh*," he adds, referring to the Joe Casey-written Image series.

However, Adlard didn't illustrate *The Walking Dead* from the offset, taking over from original artist Tony Moore on the seventh issue in 2004.





Walking Dead images © Robert Kirkman/Charlie Adlard

"If you're working on an ongoing mainstream series like *Batman* or *Judge Dredd*, you've got the luxury of knowing that other artists have worked on the character before you," he reflects. "So you're not a complete shock to the system, because readers will be used to regular art changes. Whereas *The Walking Dead* was six issues old, and nobody knew how long it was going to carry on, and suddenly somebody else replaces the guy who created the imagery of the series. And Robert didn't exactly choose someone who draws like Tony. He relies on linework and a lot of fine line hatching type of detail, while I rely on a lot more mood and heavier blacks. But after 60-odd issues, readers have hopefully now accepted my artwork."

Over the years, Adlard has formed an intuitive understanding with Kirkman, who writes full scripts but doesn't provide too much information. "We leave each other alone," says Adlard. "I pencil and ink the pages on my own, which makes it a lot faster. It's the perfect working relationship. We've got no editor, which suits us."

"THE ZOMBIES ARE JUST THE BACKGROUND. IT'S REALLY ABOUT DESPERATE PEOPLE" CHARLIE ADLARD

Unlike Kirkman, Adlard doesn't have any involvement with American network AMC's upcoming TV version of *The Walking Dead*, the first six episodes of which will screen in the States this autumn. "It would take me away from drawing the book," he says.

But he is excited by the involvement of *The Shawshank Redemption* director Frank Darabont. "It's not often you get people of that calibre attached to a television show," says Adlard, who is intrigued by the casting of Andrew Lincoln. In his first American TV role, the *This Life* star will play old-fashioned cop Rick Grimes, who emerges from a coma to discover that the world has gone to hell, while John Bernthal plays his partner and love rival Shane Walsh.

"I can't believe that, it's so weird," laughs Adlard. "In the States, no one knows who Andrew Lincoln is apart from being the guy who was in *Love Actually* but over here he's a TV star."

Kirkman and Adlard maintain that the small screen, rather than cinema, best suits *The Walking Dead*'s episodic nature. "If it was just another zombie movie with no particular uniqueness



CHARLIE ADLARD

ABOVE: Zombies! They always spoil a good party

BELOW: More *Walking Dead* goodness. Brrrrrains!

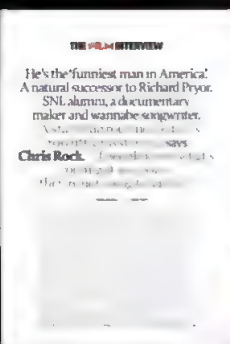
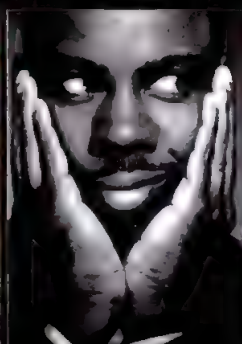
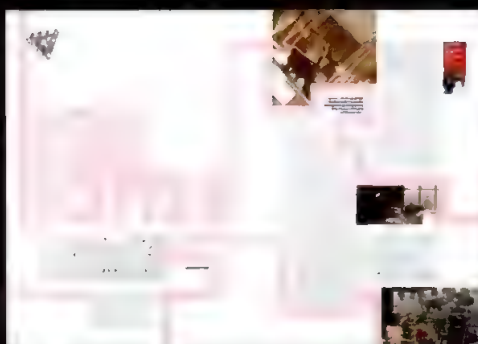


about it, it probably wouldn't be as good as something like *Zombieland*," says Adlard. "That's got a different spin on the genre but *The Walking Dead* hasn't really got a similar gimmick. The unique thing about *The Walking Dead* is that we've been able to tell the full story of a zombie apocalypse and that's why it would work for television."

Adlard has compared *The Walking Dead* to *Lost*. "Just in terms of it being exactly the same set-up," he says. "It's also about a bunch of desperate characters in an extreme situation. They're on a desert island with weird goings-on and ours is a zombie apocalypse. But unlike *Lost*, *The Walking Dead* is fairly linear."

As we speak, Adlard is working on #73 and is committed to the series for the foreseeable future. "It will pretty much run for as long as sales stay where they are," he says. "There's no end in sight. It's not like *Preacher* or *Sandman* where there are a finite number of issues. We're just going to keep going until sales tell us to stop or we run out of ideas. At the moment, with the television series, we're certainly not anticipating a dip in sales anytime soon. There's really no reason to end it at the moment and Robert has got lots of stuff in store for them in the current story arc of their lives." CH

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COMIC HEROES

REVIEWS

RATINGS EXPLAINED

Every *Comic Heroes* review is scored out of five stars. Here's what each rating means...

BRILLIANT
GOOD
AVERAGE
PRETTY POOR
RUBBISH!

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BATMAN ROUND-UP



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IRON MAN 2

MOVIE
REVIEW!

12A/124 mins

DIRECTOR: Jon Favreau

WRITER: Justin Theroux

CAST: Robert Downey Jr, Gwyneth Paltrow, Don Cheadle, Mickey Rourke, Sam Rockwell, Scarlett Johansson, Clark Gregg, Paul Bettany, John Slattery and Jon Favreau

OUT: NOW!

★★★★★

Six months after Tony Stark admits that he's Iron Man, the world is a very different place. Tony's public persona, and the threat of Iron Man, has brought world peace closer, while he himself has never been more popular. But even as Tony

frantically tries to save his own life, Ivan Vanko sets out to take vengeance on him for the sins of his father, and Justin Hammer, a long-term industrial rival, sees the chance to settle some scores.

Iron Man 2 cleverly uses the final scene of *Iron Man* to build its entire plot. Tony's confession has spurred Vanko, Hammer and SHIELD into action even as Tony himself tries to make amends. It's a fascinating way to build a story, combining the 'dark night of the soul' element that Marvel characters excel at with epic scale action and a fascinating question: what happens when the world's first superhero goes public?

The answer is chaos – and Favreau excels at it, always showing the human element in the middle of the action. The fight with Vanko at the Monaco GP is genuinely shocking, while the finale, pitting Iron Man and War Machine against Hammer's combat drones is vast in scale and always focused on the two men and the civilians they're frantically trying to save. This is an action movie built from the characters up – instead of from the spectacle down – and it works beautifully.

Iron Man 2 also manages to treat each member of its cast equally and they all hit the mark perfectly. Downey Jr and Paltrow are immense fun to watch play off one another, while Rourke brings a physicality and solidity to Whiplash that makes him a credible threat. Rockwell's smarmy Hammer also impresses, along with Bettany, Johansson, Samuel L Jackson and Clark Gregg, who returns as Agent Phil Coulson and is clearly being set up as connective tissue between the Marvel movies. Together with Favreau and Theroux, they combine to make this year's model of *Iron Man* something you won't want to miss.

Alasdair Stuart

Whiplash: more of a niche weapon these days.



MOVIE
REVIEW!

THE LOSERS

12A/97 mins

DIRECTOR: Sylvain White

WRITER: Peter Berg,

James Vanderbilt

CAST: Jeffrey Dean Morgan,

Chris Evans, Zoe Saldana

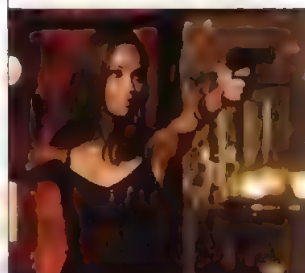
OUT: NOW!

★★★★

Director Sylvain White's adaptation of *The Losers* – the DC/Vertigo comic about a US Special Forces team betrayed left for dead, and forced to go undercover to wreak vengeance – is by no means greater than the sum of its parts. But what parts!

Chris Evans steals the show, overflowing with cocksure swagger and bravado (and an infectious love of Journey) that makes one wish his Captain America would just let it all hang out. Jason Patric's charisma is almost as palpable, he's found his calling in camp-sleaze villainy. Nominal lead Jeffrey Dean Morgan has a more thankless task as the grizzled-but-well-tailored team leader, but at least he gets to engage Zoe Saldana (never more panther-like) in plenty of fisticuffs as foreplay. The real test for *The Losers*, however will come later this summer when a certain '80s-TV-show-turned-feature-film speeds into theatres. Until then, consider it the best two-hour episode of *The A-Team* ever made. As such, it might not warrant a trip to the cinema, but on DVD this big, stupid, guilty pleasure should perfectly complement a six-pack of your favourite beer

Joe McCabe



Oh Zoe. Lovely, lovely Zoe. (Fired: - Ed)

HOLY BAT ROUND-UP!

The lowdown on what's happening in DC Comics' Gotham City...

BATMAN

WRITER: Tony Daniel

ARTIST: Guillem March

DETECTIVE COMICS

WRITER: Greg Rucka/David Hine

ARTIST: Cully Hamner and others

BATMAN AND ROBIN

WRITER: Grant Morrison

ARTIST: Andy Clarke/Scott Hanna

BATMAN: The Return of Bruce Wayne

WRITER: Grant Morrison

ARTIST: Chris Sprouse



Standing on tanks: this year's black.

THE SHIELD VOLUME 1:

Kicking Down The Door

COMIC REVIEW!

WRITERS: Eric J Trautmann, J Michael

Straczynski and Brandon Jerwa

ARTISTS: Marco Rudy, Greg Scott, Mick

Grey, Jeremy Roberts, Sal Cipriano,

Francis Manapul and Sami Basri

PUBLISHER: DC

OUT: July 6th

Joseph Higgins is an American soldier selected to be the pilot of an experimental nanotech-laced battlesuit. As *The Shield*, Higgins is a soldier first and a superhero second, as the Army task him to investigate the disappearance of Special Forces teams in Bialya and a series of very odd deaths in deepest Brazil.

Collecting the first six issues, plus the two *Red Circle* crossover specials that highlighted *The Shield* and *Inferno*, this is a perfect introduction to one of the more interesting characters DC has relaunched recently. Fans of Iron Man will find a lot to like here, as will those who enjoy TV shows like *24* and *The Unit* - Higgins combines the high-end action of the first with the political and military quandaries of the second. Higgins is a soldier, and while he's not blind to the mysteries surrounding his family or his missions, he's refreshingly direct and up front in how he deals with enemies - something Goriila Grodd finds out, to his cost.

This is a sharp, fast-paced book that looks at the superhero as a weapon instead of an icon and loses none of its idealism for doing so. It's a must-have for any fan of intelligent superheroics or gigantic telepathic apes.

Alasdair Stuart

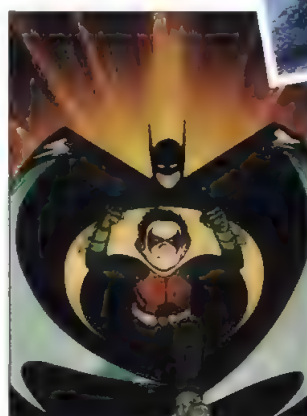
Things in Gotham have been in turmoil for months now. Batman was pushed to the limit by a mysterious group of criminals and then apparently killed in the closing stages of *Final Crisis*. After the inevitable chaos, which saw one murderous former Robin attempt to take over as Batman and another leave Gotham to find out the truth about Bruce's death, the mantle was finally passed to the original Robin, Dick Grayson, with Bruce's son by Talia Al'Ghul, Damien, taking the role of Robin.

The new status quo has allowed each of the three core series to explore different elements of life in Gotham's seedy underbelly. *Batman* has focused on Dick's investigation into the criminal Black Mask, culminating in the revelation of his connection with Dr Jeremiah Arkham and Arkham Asylum.

Detective Comics has neatly counterpointed the more traditional comic book villainy of *Batman* with street-level crime, a visit from the criminally under-used Batwoman and the return of the Falcone mob family to the top of the criminal food chain.

Thirdly, *Batman and Robin* has explored the relationship between Dick and Damien to great effect, which is set against the arrival in Gotham of amateur detective and mystery writer Oberon Sexton, who perpetually wears a face mask and top hat. Just as Dick, Damien and Alfred discover evidence that Bruce Wayne is lost in time, Dick realises that Oberon Sexton is the Joker...

Finally, *The Return of Bruce Wayne* follows Batman as he



struggles to survive at different periods in history. Arriving in the Paleolithic era with no memory of who he is, he clashes with Vandal Savage before being catapulted forward to the early settlement of America and then forward again and out to sea as a pirate. His journey is placing time itself at risk, and even as he struggles to



regain his memory, Superman, Green Lantern, Rip Hunter and Booster Gold are racing to save him before he dooms the rest of history. It's beautifully drawn by some of the best artists in the business at the moment, but it's a little too goofy to sit well with the other books.

Alasdair Stuart

BACK TO LIFE

How are the latest big events shaping up?



BRIGHTEST DAY

WRITER: Geoff Johns and Pete Tomasi
ARTISTS: Ivan Reis, Patrick Gleason, Adrian Syaf and Scott Clark, Joe Prado
PUBLISHER: DC
OUT: Now!

AVENGERS

WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTISTS: John Romita Jr and Klaus Jenson
PUBLISHER: Marvel
OUT: Now!

The best aspect of the more uplifting brand of new tomorrows ushered in by the long awaited climax of Marvel's *Siege* and DC's *Blackest Night* crossovers is – thankfully – a distinct improvement in story quality.

The Geoff Johns-written *Blackest Night* outshone Brian Michael Bendis's sprawling *Siege*. Building thematically on the wry commentary about the impermanent nature of death in superhero universes that DC's chief creative officer began with Hal Jordan and Barry Allen's respective rebirths, it concluded with 12 previously deceased heroes and villains returning from the grave.

Brightest Day follows the fortunes of those characters as they attempt to make new lives for themselves. Johns and co-writer Pete Tomasi have assembled a motley cast, which includes Martian Manhunter, Aquaman and, most interestingly, the now-alive Deadman, who discover that there are some malevolent side-effects to their recent resurrections. Johns' writing on *Blackest Night* was supported by Ivan Reis's impressively detailed widescreen art. The Brazilian returns on *Brightest Day* as part of a tag-team of artists, whose various styles gel together almost seamlessly to great effect.

In contrast to the more self-contained *Blackest Night*, *Siege* suffered from having its relatively thin plot spread over too many other related titles. Its central premise of Norman Osborn manipulating Volstagg



into accidentally committing an atrocity to trigger an invasion of Asgard was a little too similar to Mark Millar's superior *Civil War*, which set the scene for the erstwhile Green Goblin's dark reign in 2006. The death of the all-too-powerful Sentry was predictable and underwhelming when it finally occurred.

Fortunately, Bendis is back to his best on the new, adjective-free *Avengers* series, which launches *The Heroic Age*. The Marvel Universe's newly appointed top cop Steve Rogers assembles a line-up dominated by the House Of Ideas' top guns, including Iron Man, Thor, Wolverine, Spider-Man and Bucky 'Captain America' Barnes. The gathering is interrupted by the arrival of 'time terrorist' Kang The Conqueror, sowing the seeds for an intriguing, centuries-spanning epic that harks back to the classic *Avengers* sagas of the '70s and '80s.

While *Siege* benefited from Olivier Coipel's fluid cartooning, *Avengers* features some truly kick-ass (pun very much intended) work from John Romita Jr, whose expansive storytelling is given a warm sheen by Klaus Janson's inks. The triumphant dawn of a new era.

Stephen Jewell



The Rainbow Orchid

WRITER: Garen Ewing
ARTIST: Garen Ewing
PUBLISHER: Egmont
OUT: Now!

The splendidly-named Julius Chancer is the young and adventurous assistant of Sir Alfred Catesby-Grey, an antiquarian with a rich past. It's the 1920s and the Empire is at its height. When Lord Lawrence makes a foolish bet with banana magnate Urkaz Grope, Chancer teams up with Lawrence's film star daughter against his mentor's wishes, to track down a mysterious orchid that will help them save Lawrence's bacon.

This fusion of *Tintin* and *Indiana Jones* tries to capture the appeal of both properties, but doesn't quite nail it. The 'ligne claire' art is beautiful, but the story is lethargic, burdened with a long set-up, overly complicated plot and a back story determined not to stay in the background; all the hallmarks of a creator-owned project from a raw talent. (It's remarkably similar to the feeling you get from watching Peter Jackson's *King Kong*). Part two is a better read, but even so, you feel that a more experienced and ruthless writer could have got all of this into one volume.

A collaboration might have tightened up *The Rainbow Orchid*. Perhaps Ewing needs someone with a different take on narrative to argue with, because it seems like he's too close to his creation to avoid bunging two or three kitchen sinks into the story, and the end result is a tad flabby.

Guy Haley

JOE THE BARBARIAN

WRITER: Grant Morrison

ARTIST: Sean Murphy

PUBLISHER: DC

OUT: Now!

Poor old Joe isn't having a good day. Bullied at school and in danger of dying from a diabetic episode, he's hallucinating impressively through a fantasy landscape while he tries to drag himself through his house to an all-important sugary drink.

Grant Morrison's work is often difficult to get into, but ultimately turns out to be rewarding. *Joe The Barbarian* is easily his most accessible tale since *WE3*, but it does come with its own problems.

While it's beautifully drawn and very well written, it simply just doesn't work in monthly instalments. It's rather obviously designed to be read in one sitting, and will one day make for a fantastic trade paperback. At times it feels like it's treading water a little, but that's more of an issue when it takes eight months to read.

If this was a review of the collected edition, the mark would likely be higher. As it is, it's difficult to completely recommend, despite the enormous quality that's obviously on offer.

Chris Brosnahan



The sugar, Joe! Get to the sugar!

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER Season 8

WRITER: Brad Meltzer

ARTIST: Georges Jeanty

PUBLISHER: Dark Horse

OUT: Now!

The ongoing season eight of *Buffy* has been running for an astonishing three years now, and has proved to be largely excellent. Much of this can be laid at the door of *Buffy* creator and custodian Joss Whedon himself (and regular artist Georges Jeanty), but a stellar array of guest writers, such as Jane Espenson, Drew Goddard and Brian K Vaughan, have got the snappy dialogue, character quirks and mythology down pat. Brad Meltzer's recently wrapped-up culmination of the 'Twilight' storyline has been especially good on the snark, even if the reveal of this season's Big Bad – gasp! It's Angel! What? – was a little contentious.

The cosmic reason for everything – Buffy's 'evolved' by sharing her power with other potential Slayers, so the universe grants her new abilities to defend against greater threats – seems oddly ordinary in context, but the fact that the explanation for it is counterpointed with an issue-long superpowered sex scene with Buffy and Angel makes it easy to excuse. Issue 35, the 'Twilight' finale, leaves us with a natty cliffhanger as none other than Spike arrives in what appears to be a magic tunnelling train to save the day. It's great fun, even if it works better when focusing on smaller threats than all-encompassing armageddons. **Jes Bickham**



Oh Angel, with your big hair and tormented soul...

THE UNWRITTEN

WRITER: Mike Carey

ARTIST: Peter Gross

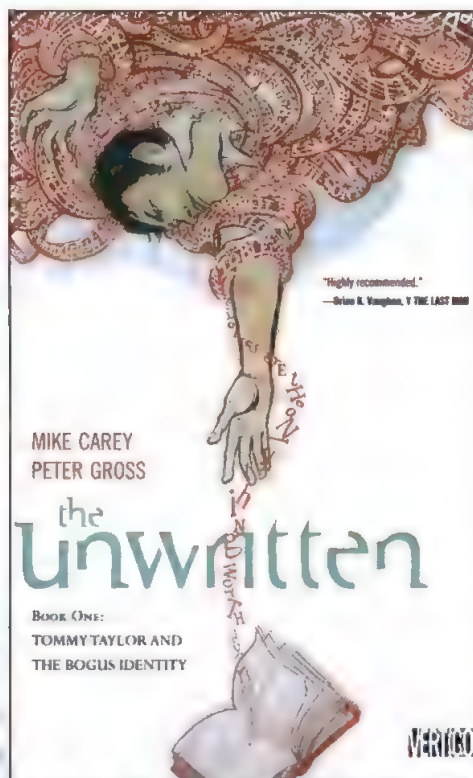
PUBLISHER: DC Vertigo

OUT: Now!

Natural teams in comics are a rare thing these days. This makes the collaborative partnership between Mike Carey and Peter Gross even more of a pleasure than it already was. Gross was the most regular artist on Carey's *Lucifer*, and for most partnerships, this would likely be a career high. *The Unwritten*, however, is on another level altogether.

The story is simple at first glance. The Tommy Taylor books are a global sensation, despite the author going missing. His son, Tom, is well known as the 'inspiration' for the series. However, when he finds out that his parentage is in doubt, and his entire existence may be a fraud, Tom starts exploring the world of fiction, finding out that the boundaries are thinner than previously thought.

This simplicity allows for a complicated tale. Tommy's confusion over his true nature is the driving force of the story, and leads to an exploration of stories reminiscent of the way Neil Gaiman used *The Sandman* to explore dreams and tales. This is Vertigo's best series since *Fables*, and has the potential to be one of the most interesting comics since *Sandman*. Smart and beautiful, mature comics don't get much better than this. **Chris Brosnahan**



MIKE CAREY
PETER GROSS

the
Unwritten

BOOK ONE:
TOMMY TAYLOR AND
THE BOGUS IDENTITY

VERTIGO

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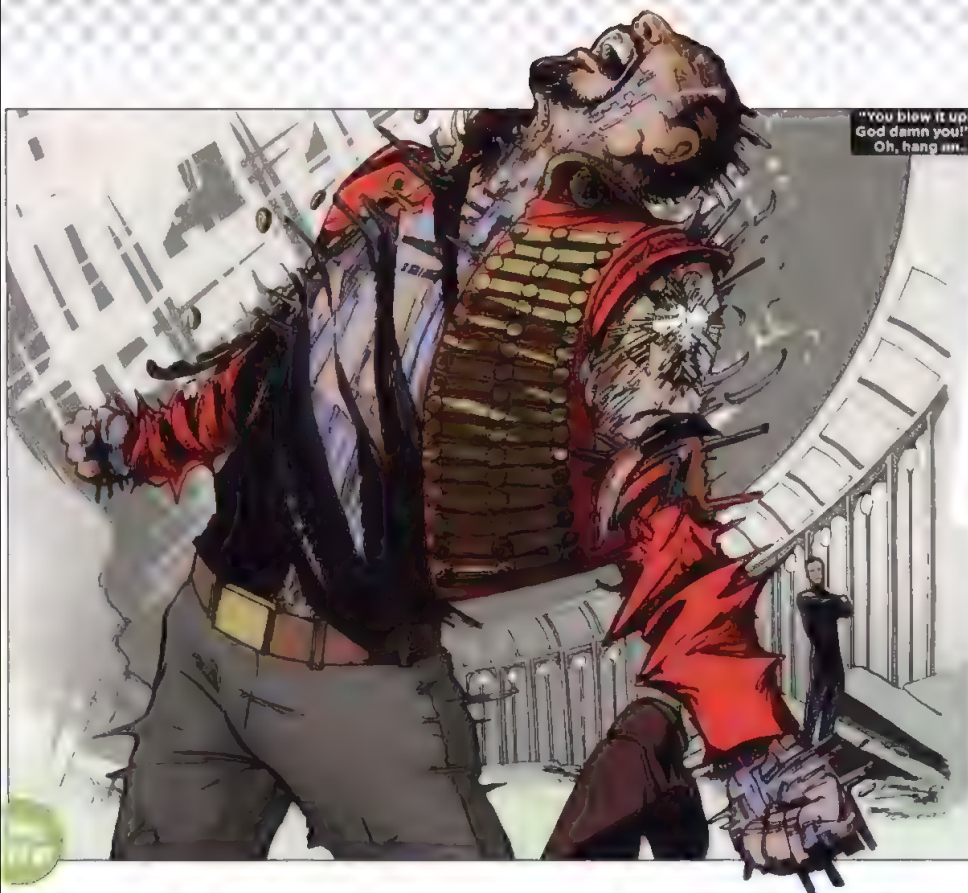
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NO BATS - GUARANTEED!



2000 AD

WRITERS: Various
ARTISTS: Various
PUBLISHER: Rebellion
OUT: Every week

If you're a thirtysomething comic fan who grew up in the UK, it's impossible to overstate the significance and importance of *2000 AD*. The Pat Mills-launched SF anthology weekly – inspired more by *Metal Hurlant* than American superhero comics – informed the cultural upbringing of an entire generation. Only *Star Wars* can claim to have burrowed deeper into the collective subconscious.

But how's it doing these days, 33 years since its birth? The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is really ruddy well; the last couple of months have seen the comic on something close to top form. You might think nothing else could be

done with Judge Dredd and his world, but the epic 'Tour of Duty' storyline ploughs on with a terrific line in inter-departmental politicking, and with cracked serial killer PJ Maybe in the Mega City One mayor's seat, it's a bit like *The Wire* with added science fiction lunacy and killer robots. Nice to see the underrated John Higgins on art duties too, along with Colin McNeil.

Other long-form tales have shone recently, too – notable examples being Pat Mills and Clint Langley's 'The Volgan War', which looks like nothing on Earth, and Nikolai Dante's 'Heroes Be Damned', which has a nice line in present-day terror and tragedy interwoven with heartfelt flashbacks. But it's a brace of new stories that have really stood out of late: Al Ewing's recently-finished 'Zombo's II', and Rob Williams' *The Greivous Journey of*



Ichabod Azrael (And The Dead Left In His Wake). The former is a gloriously demented slice of gut-ripping glee, where our brain-eating innocent leads the charge against a league of zombies on an infested space station. Pumped with snappy dialogue, bizarre humour, the occasional song and wonderful art by Henry Flint, it's an offbeat delight. Also: zombie bees called, fittingly, Zom-bee (Ewing's ongoing, more serious *Damnation Station* is a treat, too, if markedly less entertaining).

Williams's *Azrael*, meanwhile, is an unholy mash-up of *Unforgiven*, *Preacher*'s The Saint Of Killers

and Johnny Cash's 'The Man Comes Around'; that's simply terrific. The eponymous anti-hero, a remorseless killer who finds himself in a frontier hell, has a story told by a possibly unreliable narrator who speaks like he's straight out of *Deadwood*. It's epic, creepy, violent, and roiling in filthy, infernal atmosphere, with Dom Reardon's Sean Phillips-esque monochrome artwork providing a stark and expressive counterpoint to the positively Shakespearean text. It is, to be frank, fantastic.

So then: *2000 AD* endures, and how. Long may it continue. **Jes Bickham**



Ironically, the playwright soon becomes concerned with his own physique.



Sadly, we know how he feels. Time for a jog.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

WRITER: Daren White

ARTIST: Eddie Campbell

PUBLISHER: Top Shelf

OUT: NOW!

The Playwright is written by Daren White, but you'd be forgiven for thinking that Eddie Campbell did the words as well as the pictures, so strongly does it echo his own autobiographical *Alec* books in personal tone. That *The Playwright* is also just as brilliant as the *Alec* books further cements this comparison; White and Campbell are a match made in heaven, with the words and art complementing each other beautifully.

A nameless narrator details the interior life of the titular Playwright, at the edge of a mid-life crisis as he deals with where his earlier life choices have led him. Biting, funny, heartbreaking, shocking, scabrous and ultimately

triumphant and moving, the Playwright's story is both uncomfortable and relatable because here are our own secret thoughts, fears and hopes laid bare – especially the sexual ones. What's remarkable is the journey the reader goes on, along with the protagonist; the incontrovertible first thought on starting *The Playwright* is that this is a sad and creepy little man. And yet, for all his sexual obsessions and anxieties, he is no different from the rest of us, and as we spiral into the complexities of his life, we begin to feel and root for him, and recognise pieces of ourselves.

It's a peculiarly British-feeling book – all repression, sexual and otherwise – but there's great power in its intimate chronicle of a life that needs to change. You can read an excerpt in our covermounted *Sidekick* comic, and we thoroughly recommend the thing entire.

Jes Bickham

ROGUE TROOPER:

Tales Of Nu-Earth 02

WRITER: Gerry Finley-Day

ARTISTS: Cam Kennedy, Brett Ewins, Steve Dillon, Robin Smith, Boluda and Trevor Goring

PUBLISHER: Rebellion

OUT: NOW!

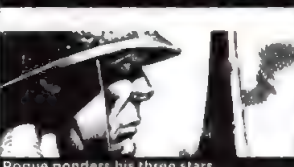
The key to success is knowing when to stop. Having scoured Nu-Earth in his quest for the Traitor General whose betrayal made him the sole remaining Genetic Infantryman, Gerry Finley-Day's *Rogue Trooper* had begun to run out of steam by the time it came to their final confrontation.

This second helping of 2000 AD's blue-skinned warrior reprints the moment he should have gracefully bowed out.

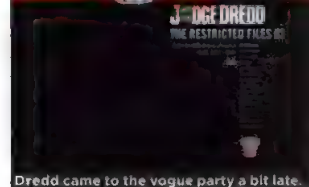
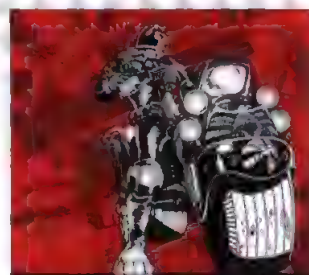
Despite plenty of nice stories and highlights such as 'Gasbah', the overall feel is of loose ends being tied together and, after all that effort, the Traitor's end comes as more of a whimper than a bang.

Book one was dominated by co-creator Dave Gibbons and cool technologist Colin Wilson; this volume belongs to Cam Kennedy, and his stark, dynamic work – which is some of the best future war art you'll ever see – is the main reason to shell out for this telephone directory of a volume.

Michael Molcher



Rogue ponders his three stars.



JUDGE DREDD:

The Restricted Files 02

WRITER: John Wagner, Alan Grant

ARTISTS: Carlos Ezquerro, Cam Kennedy, John Higgins, Ian Gibson, Bryan Talbot, Mark Farmer, Brett Ewins, Brendan McCarthy, Steve Dillon, Will Simpson and Arthur Ranson

PUBLISHER: Rebellion

OUT: Now

Comic book annuals used to say 'Christmas' as much as roast turkey and bad TV, and although 2000 AD's annuals and all-year-round 'specials' were sometimes a dumping ground for below-par material, this meaty collection mops up tales missed by the on-going *Judge Dredd Case Files*, digging up some neglected gems along the way.

There are the sadly expected clunkers, and some stories that are now blunted by excessive reprints, but *Dredd* is always best when it focuses on the madcap inhabitants of Mega City One and there are some real forgotten classics from some of 2000 AD's top talent here. Brendan McCarthy's hallucinogenic trips and John Higgins' dark nightmares are given the treatment they've always deserved, and there are even a few surprisingly gritty Arthur Ranson strips that have been scandalously ignored.

As readers grow older, the allure of the stocking filler annual or seasonal specials almost inevitably wanes. But that doesn't really matter – Christmas just wouldn't be the same without 'em.

Michael Molcher

LENORE: Wedgies

WRITER/ARTIST: Roman Dirge
PUBLISHER: Titan
OUT: NOW!

There's a world of psycho-research to be done into goths, like why are they obsessed with dead stuff, where do they buy those neat outfits, and how come 13.7 per cent of goths girls are brain meltingly hot? If you were looking for evidence that they are a humorous, potty-me types that take themselves too seriously, then *Lenore* would be your hypothesis so steep clear – *Lenore*'s positively chipper.

An undead girl named for Poe's poem, *Lenore* lives in a creepy mansion with creepy friends and has adventures involving accidentally (and not so accidentally) hurting things. Part of the *Adams Family* or family of macabre humour, the closest thing out there now is the whacked-out webcomic *Sand Fingers*, though *Lenore* is by no means as disturbing.

The tales in this putrid but collectible include out-of-graphical skits about author Dirge and one-offs. They're all pretty funny (*Samurai Sloth* – hilarious!) though Dirge's poetry (yeah, a number are in rhyme) is pretty bad. Cute without being saccharine sinister without being scary, only the casual violence and gore would stop us giving this to a young kid, it would however make a suitable love offering for one of the 13.7 per cent mentioned above. Great fun! *Lenore* is a Beet juice frame of mind.
Guy Haley



Best read while drinking Snakebite.

MAOH: Juvenile Remix Vol 01

WRITER: Kotaro Isaka
ARTIST: Megumi Osaga
PUBLISHER: Viz Media
OUT: NOW!

A neat little mash-up of high school drama, teen angst, social responsibility and civic concern, this first volume of *Maoh: Juvenile Remix* is a pleasing set-up for what we can only assume are darker times ahead.

The city of Nekota is falling victim to rapid modernisation, with old traditions and community both falling apart. The mysterious Inukai and his Grasshopper vigilante organisation pledge to clean the place up – but is he a force for good or evil? That's the worry of schoolboy Ando, who discovers he can make others say what he thinks – an ESP power he calls 'ventriloquism'.

At the end of this manga we find that Inukai's initially honourable mission has sinister repercussions, as a fellow student of Ando's wreaks a terrible revenge on some bullies in Grasshopper's name, and a city councillor opposed by Inukai in a live debate appears to commit suicide. It's well-paced, and the emphasis on the cultural cost of progress is an interesting one – it's a just a shame that Ando's such a wet blanket for so long. Still, colour us intrigued for volume 02. **Jes Bickham**



THE LORDS OF MISRULE

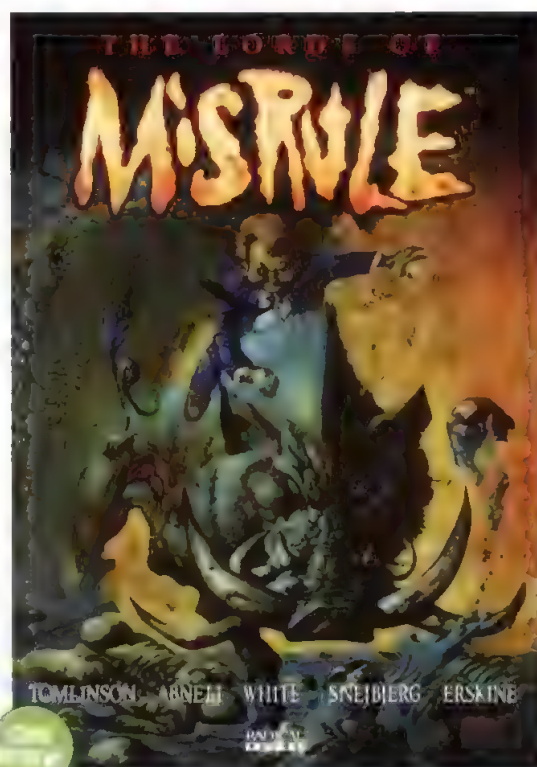
WRITERS: John Tomlinson, Dan Abnett, Steve White
ARTISTS: Gary Erskine, Peter Snejbjerg (covers by Simon Bisley and John Higgins)
PUBLISHER: Radical Books (Turnaround in the UK)
OUT: NOW

Available for the first time as a colour collection, *The Lords Of Misrule*'s got a checkered history (it was first commissioned for the now-defunct Tundra and eventually saw black-and-white life through Dark Horse). It's fantastic that Radical has resurrected it though (in colour, to boot!), as this is something of a lost classic, a collaborative horror tale with some startling talent involved.

It all revolves around the peculiar English village of Callow and the supernatural threat therein. Each chapter here is part of a greater whole, as a disparate cast of characters find that they're all unwittingly woven into a tapestry of supernatural horror.

The Lords of Misrule is less effective when it brings on the monsters, but when it keeps things vague it's genuinely sinister and unsettling. The first story here, 'Pale Hands', is the best – you'll want to wear gloves for a while afterwards – but taken as whole, this is a hefty, rewarding read that explores a particularly English kind of horror. It's great to see it all back in print.

Jes Bickham





MARVEL DVD ROUND-UP

A trip down Marvel's memory lane...

SPIDER-MAN 5000: VOLUME ONE

1981/£14.99/PG/2hrs 33 minutes

OUT: NOW!

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: THE COMPLETE SERIES

1982/£14.99/U/5hrs 6minutes

OUT: NOW!

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED

1999/£19.99/PG/4hrs 23 minutes

OUT: NOW!

Two '80s vintage toons and a jazzy late '90s comics-fest make up our overview of animated Marvel mayhem this time around, for all you true believers.

The Hulk and *Spider-Man* (1982 and 1981 respectively) are so similar you couldn't get a four-colour page between them – plenty of cameos from favourite super-villains, Stan Lee voice-overs and cheapo TV animation. They're less interesting than the earlier versions of the two shows, and are trammelled by the societal mores that affected cartoons of the era. *Hulk* gains a comedy supporting cast at Rio's Rancheros, a Mexican grill in the desert near the army base, as well

as a starring role for a Stetson wearing Rick Jones, who's more annoying than he is in the comics. We're short on classic *Hulk* villains, too. *Spider-Man*'s more fun. Spidey's quick wit is in evidence, and it's faithful both to the origin story and the artwork of Romita Sr's newspaper strips. Only the depiction of Aunt May as a senile idiot spoils it.

Spider-Man Unlimited is a different beast entirely. Here Spidey is removed from his normal setting to an alternative Earth where he can have a discrete adventure, safe and sound from continuity hounds.

J Jonah Jameson's astronaut son, John, has headed off to a newly discovered 'Counter-Earth' on the far side of the Sun, only to discover an oppressed human race lorded over by a race of beast-people created by the High Evolutionary (there have been three Counter-Earths in the comics, one of them made by the High Evolutionary, but this particular one is separate from the main comics line). This sci-fi staple setting is fit for our sci-fi Spidey, equipped with a nanotech super-suit, as he heads off to Counter-Earth on a rescue mission. Y'see, Jameson Jr's

launch was hijacked by Carnage and Venom, Spidey was blamed, so he sets out to save the day and clear his name. Whew!

All very complicated, but the superior, slightly manga-influenced animation, energetic scripting and the novel scenario make for a bunch of fun. Sadly the story was never concluded, either in the cartoon (cancelled with half of its 13 episodes unaired) or in the accompanying comic.

Guy Haley



SUPERMAN ON TRIAL

1988/BBC/£8.99/60 mins

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Dirk Maggs

STARRING: Stuart Milligan, Shelley Thompson, William Hootkins

BATMAN:

The Lazarus Syndrome

1989/BBC/£8.99 each/60 mins

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Dirk Maggs

STARRING: Bob Sessions, Michael Gough, Garrick Hagon

Two early efforts from the master of sci-fi audio, Dirk Maggs, these two dramas presented here uncut, were originally aired 20 years ago by Radio 4 to celebrate the 50th birthdays of Superman and Batman respectively.

Batman's outing is the better of the two, its plot (concerning Ra's al Ghul) allowing a painless stroll down memory lane, while Michael Gough makes an awesome Alfred.

Supes' trial is less successful. Sporting cameos from the likes of Adam West and Dave Gibbons presenting evidence about the hero, and a dollop of facts about Superman's real-world history, the fourth wall does not come down easily, while the drama is forced, with a cackling Luthor and hillbilly takes on the Kents.

Maggs is a bit too faithful to his source material. It's hard to see who these full cast dramas are pitched at – they present the listener with potted histories, but they're not suitable as introductions to the characters, because they contain a lot of important references only a long-time comics fan would get.

But both exhibit Maggs' usual flair: great sound design, proper scripts and a certain energy lacking in other audio productions, plus his deep affection for his subjects. They're worth it for that alone.

Guy Haley



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OUT: NOW!

MARK VI METALON

FROM: MEGA Brands

PRICE: £7.99

OUT: NOW!

As is the case with any Hollywood blockbuster these days, *Iron Man 2* has been accompanied by a raft of toys, models and various other tie-in merchandise, which runs the gamut of quality and interest.

We must admit to being pleasantly surprised by Mega Brands' spread of Stark-based offerings, as it all puts an emphasis on finger-fangling

construction. Much like Lego, in fact – and who doesn't love Lego?

They vary hugely in terms of complexity, and the simplest figurine here, the Mark VI Metalon, is one of the most fun. Essentially assembled using magnets, he's a chunky, poseable little Iron Man, and while his arms come off if you bend or pull them too far, there's huge tactile pleasure to be had here. In fact, the fact that he comes apart and goes together so easily makes the Metalon a much more robust plaything than the other two sets here. A great stress reliever for overworked magazine editors, we can tell you.

The Techbot is twice the size of the Metalon, and is an imposing, impressive figure once assembled, but it's sometimes a pain in the fundament to put together. Small fingers, especially, may bear the scars (or indentations, at least) of trying to squeeze arms and legs into joint sockets; and for the fair, fragile hands of a journalist, unused to

labour more intensive than lightly tapping the keys on a keyboard, it caused a fair few wincers. It's a hell of a figure once you get through the agony, but perhaps better suited to executive desk toy than bedroom-floor action hero.

The final set we received this issue, the Whiplash Showdown, hits all the same pleasure buttons as putting together a decent Lego

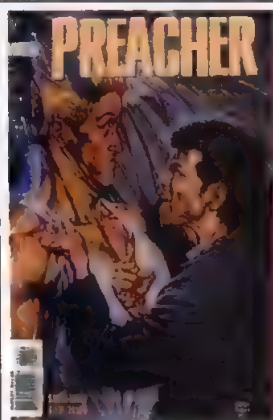
set, as it's constructed from innumerable stud-riven blocks (even if Whiplash himself looks less like Mickey Rourke and more like a member of Linkin Park. Are they still going? Is that a relevant reference? We don't know. We never got past Whitesnake and Poison). It's a two piece set, featuring both a teeny Iron Man in Tony Stark's racing car, and Ivan Vanko in a whip-equipped walker suit. The car is superb, nicely solid once built, and even features a pull-back-and-go engine; the walker's more problematic thanks to a weak waist joint, meaning the chunky upper half often falls off. Not ideal. Having said that, the pleasingly powerful spring-loaded missile launcher comes close to making up for it.

All in all, a pretty good set of toys for Marvel's latest big-screen hero; head over to www.megabrands.com to see the rest of the range. We *really* want the War Machine Metalon.

Jes Bickham



COMIC CLUB



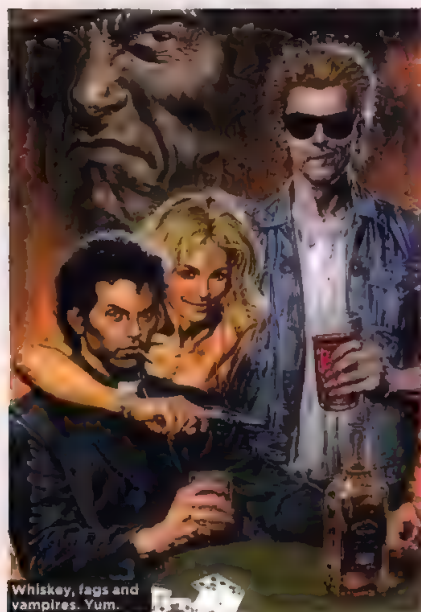
EXPLORING THE
MUST-READ
CLASSICS
OF COMICDOM

PREACHER

GARTH ENNIS
AND STEVE DILLON 1995

The sacred and the profane collide with hugely entertaining results in *Preacher*, says Jes Bickham...

You could argue that DC's Vertigo imprint isn't a patch on what it used to be. That would, of course, be a lie, as Vertigo is currently in rude critical health - think of *Air*, *Fables*, *The Unwritten*, *Joe the Barbarian* and the evergreen *Hellblazer*, for starters - but it's also a mark of the colossal shadows cast by two of its biggest success stories, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* and Ennis and Dillon's *Preacher*. Everything else seems diminished in their lee; both run to multi-volume, self-contained stories, both are wildly imaginative, both are masterfully told. Going back to *Sandman*, you admire the layers of text and subtext, the bold use of manifold myths, the sheer detail and imagination of the story... going back to *Preacher*, you laugh out loud at the sheer



Whiskey, fags and vampires. Yum.

profanity, violence and wit - and feel your heart break at the raw humanity on offer.

It's a weird mix, on paper; Jesse Custer, a dissolute preacher, accidentally hosts the bastard offspring of a demon and angel, and gains the power to command others. He promptly goes off to find God, who has abandoned Heaven, and makes him pay for the wrongs he's wrought. Custer's joined on his journey by one of comicdom's most entertaining casts - Tulip, the love of his life; the careless, hard-drinking vampire, Cassidy; the ghost of John Wayne (or is it?); tragic-comic suicide survivor Arseface and more. Custer's also got a wonderful nemesis in the shape of German bad guy Herr Starr, head of the Grail - a secret organisation tasked with preserving the bloodline of Christ. Starr loses a grievous selection of body parts over the course of the 66-issue series.

On its most basic level, *Preacher* is a riot, and offensive to pretty much everyone. But it's driven by a fierce sense of right and wrong and ends up being a love story that just about splits your heart open. That, and a Western.

But, by God, do Ennis and Dillon have a lot of fun along the way. Dillon's bold, clean line-work is a joy, his ability to render a particular expression so strong that the laughs and feeling come as much from him as they do from Ennis' words. He's also got a way with punished flesh, and he and Ennis plumb some outright hellish depths here - none more so than when Custer and Tulip are captured by Custer's demented grandmother and his dreadful kin in the second collection in the series 'Until The End Of The World.' Here we learn the awful history of Jesse's life and - even though Custer earlier orders a racist cop to "fuck himself", with hideously literal results



- Ennis and Dillon's greatest trick is to get us to sympathise and empathise with their hero through thick and thin. Sure, his is an old-fashioned cartoon morality, but it's also one that's hard to argue with.

Of course, it's valid to criticise *Preacher*'s wanton violence, swearing and gender roles, and some familiarity with Ennis' own work on *Hellblazer*. But to do so is to deny yourself a quite extraordinary revelry in comic escapism that isn't afraid to go to hilarious extremes. But between those extremes lies the most elusive quality of all: heart. **CB**

PREACHER IS OFFENSIVE TO PRETTY MUCH EVERYONE. BUT IT ENDS UP A LOVE STORY THAT SPLITS YOUR HEART OPEN

We love the voodoo
that you do... oh,
never mind.



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We'll be looking at a different classic comic in every instalment of Comic Club, and we want to hear what you think of them! In the next issue of *Comic Heroes* we'll be looking at Grant Morrison's 'All Star Superman'. Send your thoughts to comicheroes.futurenet.com and we'll print them in issue two!

WHAT YOU THOUGHT...

Preacher is my favourite comic of all time, not least because it has a contained, finite story. I mean, a story where God himself is the big bad? That can't be bad. It's an apocalyptic Western with Hank Marvin spliced with Clint Eastwood as the Saint of Killers. The main trio are characters you deeply care about, even Cassidy, when the full horror of his past is revealed. Great bad guys too, like Jody and TC and, of course, Herr Starr.

For me, *Gone To Texas* was a fun little romp, but the series came together as pure genius with the amazing 'Until The End Of The World' and especially the first part 'All In The Family', which revealed the painful childhood endured by Jesse and his final confrontation with his nightmarish grandma and her goons. Jody's last words to Jesse after his spine is snapped - "Proud as you, boy!" - kind of sum them up.

It's also without any shadow of a doubt the most romantic thing I have ever read, watched or heard of.

Neil Hickman

Preacher is what got me into reading comics - I lent the first issue to a friend and he hasn't stopped pestering me for the rest! CLASSIC!

Stacey Kerrigan

Preacher has to go down as one of the all-time classics. Well-written, well drawn and on top of that, swearing, sex and violence. What more could you ask for? Will be interested in how it translates to screen.

Adam Turner

Read *Preacher* when it came out and loved it. Just started re-reading it and it's just as good as I remembered.

Craig Mitchell

Preacher, along with other many other '90s comics such as *Lobo*, were 'fast comics' in much the same way that McDonald's burgers are fast food, ie. brash and tasty but unfulfilling and aimed at youngsters. Like the rest of its Vertigo brethren at the time, *Preacher* was just another superhero really. What could be a more blatant sign of adolescent wish-fulfilment than the standard heroic alpha male comic book hero having the voice of God? The power to make anyone follow his spoken commands, never mind having a sexy, blonde, bendy girlfriend and a comic relief sidekick in the shape of a totally non-stereotypical, hard drinking, Irish vampire who loves to dish out lashings of ultra-violence to 'eeits' and the like. What more could possibly titillate the average bookish, shrinking violet 20-something or his more 'chilled' and cynical counterpart, the obnoxious 20-something idiot?

Rory Regan II

Looked at on a purely superficial level, *Preacher* is simply a macho exercise in wish fulfillment. So is *Beowulf*, so is *Homer's Odyssey*. The same can be said of pretty much any classic heroic myth. Both of those are also epic tales of growth, self-realisation and responsibility. Take away the scatological and the comic grotesques, and *Preacher* is a very dark tale and surprisingly complex. It can be read as simply another super-powered shoot 'em up, but only just. I occasionally found Ennis's scatological a little wearing, but just because it was popular doesn't mean it was simplistic toss. Like most decent writing, it's capable of operating on a variety of levels.

Happy Hangman



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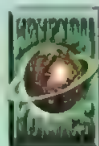
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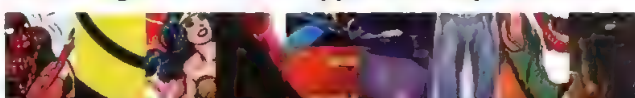
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PHILIP MADOC - "The War Games",
"The Brain Of Morbius"

NICHOLAS PARSONS - "The Curse Of Fenric"

FLORENCE HOATH - "The Empty Child / The Doctor Dances"

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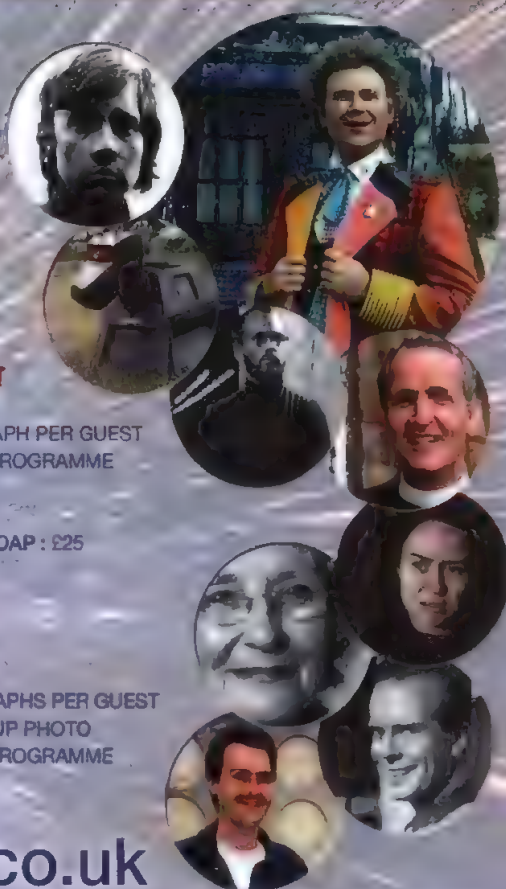
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MY INSPIRATION CLINT LANGLEY



Clint Langley's best known for his startling artwork on 2000 AD stories such as *Slaine* and *The ABC Warriors*, which combine painting, photography and digital art. He's also provided cover art for Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* with Dan Abnett, and is currently working on the forthcoming *American Reaper* with long-time collaborator Pat Mills (the first pages of which you can read in *Sidekick*, free with this magazine!). Here he tells us about the things that really fire his creative engines...

1 My early inspiration came from watching the spaghetti westerns of Sergio Leone. The sweeping visuals, ultra-cool gunslingers, Ennio Morricone soundtracks and Gian Maria Volonte as the coolest villain ever... Those films inspire my art still.

2 Hammer horror movies also made their mark on my work; I loved the dark, smoky, sinister and Gothic style, and the more-often-than-not grim endings.

3 2000 AD has been my biggest comic book inspiration since I first laid eyes on it when seven years old. I knew then that I was going to be a comic artist one day.

4 Nemesis the Warlock, ABC Warriors and *Slaine* by Pat Mills were my favourite strips from the comic. Kevin O'Neil's art for Nemesis was fantastic.

5 John Hicklenton's incredible magnum opus 100 months (pictured far right), which everyone should own when it hits the shops. Johnny showed this work to me and it blew me away unlike anything I have ever seen! A truly, truly unique and inspiring man who is forever with me. Travel well, my friend.



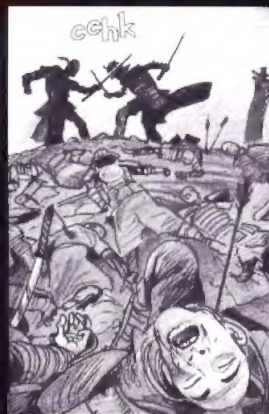
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by day and by night that he has to die."

Daidoji Yuzan

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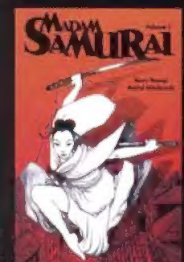
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